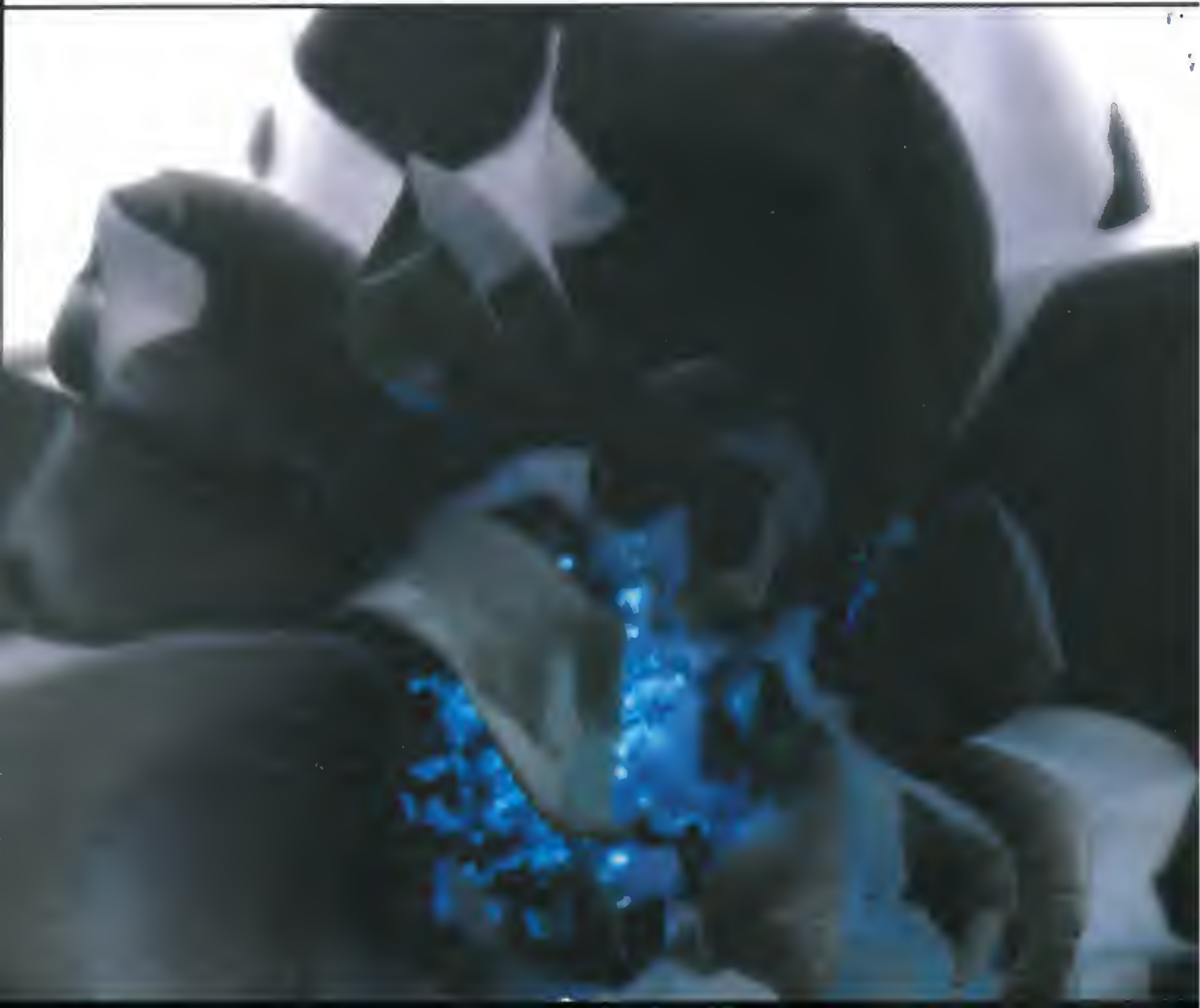


Measure

2012-2013



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This issue of *Measure* is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Robert Garrity, in honor of his hard work in the Saint Joseph's College English Department, and the lasting effect he had on the school and all of his students.

Remembering Dr. Garrity

Matthew Hess

In the closing days of January 2012 Saint Joseph's College lost one of the most influential and prolific minds that ever sat on the faculty: Robert Garrity. After arriving here at Saint Joe's in 1972 as the Dean of Academic Affairs, he began to work on reorganizing the college after the great fire of the Administration Building and helping along the fledgling Core Program, which was only a few years old. In 1984, Dr. Garrity was able to return to his love of teaching and joined the English Department.

It wasn't until Dr. Garrity's last semester of teaching that I met him. I had him for Core III and a philosophy class. His extensive and well-rounded knowledge of the liberal arts made him a spellbinding teacher. Each thought flowed from another, and was a new perspective of looking at the world. These nine credit hours that I was privileged to take with Dr. Garrity were not easy, but I would not trade them for anything. Even though our time together was brief, it was a full time, never a minute wasted.

I can remember receiving an email from Dr. Garrity the summer before classes were to begin, to inform the Modern Philosophy Class that he would be taking it over. I still have a copy of this

email. It was a perfect example of his humor and intellect. I was not at all prepared for class with this man. The amount of information was overwhelming. It just came at you so fast and I wish that I had more time for it to sink in. Later, in January, near his death, someone said that what he might have already forgotten is more than most could learn in their life time.

This statement is probably true. An example would be if one just looked at the languages Dr. Garrity knew. In Core III, the struggle for truth brings sophomores to the ancient beginnings of Western Civilization and the wisdom contained there. Throughout the course of the semester, we were treated to short lessons Latin and Greek. In my philosophy class, there was much of the same; Descartes “cogito ergo sum” or being asked what the “telos” of an argument was. He also was fluent in French, which we looked at when we read Descartes. German, however, was his first love, and was what he majored in for his undergraduate degree.

Although language and philosophy were what the college paid him to teach, that was not what Dr. Garrity and I discussed outside (and sometimes even during) class. In his email he states that his first master’s degree was in Theology. This was acquired in 1954, and was completed in a much more traditional manner than today. He and I would discuss traditional Catholic thought, often giving me books to read on top of the reading I had for classes. While my professor, he purchased a book for me and inscribed the following words that will remain in mind for years to come: “Matt, how to support our opinions with doctrinal fact.” These words speak now for more than this book when put into the context of our time together. Moreover, not just our time but the time that he spent here at Saint Joseph’s College: helping students form their views from facts.

When Measure decided to dedicate this issue to Dr. Garrity, I was thrilled and thought it was quite fitting. After giving his students the tools, he loved to see what they would create. Dr. Garrity himself was a master in the theater arts and creative writing, in fact advising Measure for some years. All the knowledge he had fueled his creativity. This is a fiery passion that his students could feel in the class room. As a man who came here and had to help clean up from the great fire, Dr. Garrity continued to set fires in the hearts and minds of his students. With the same creative spirit as this publication filled with his pupil’s work, he would inspire and instruct so that they might be full of truth to pass onto the world outside of Saint Joseph’s College. It seems fitting then that this issue of Measure is dedicated to you, Dr. Garrity. Thank you for all you have for your students and for the College. May you continue to watch over our work from your home with the Father.

I consider Bob to be one of the great personalities I've ever known. He had a knowledge of history and philosophy that astounded his students, who thought he was brilliant. Plus he was an actor, he loved to sing and play Trivial Pursuit or any other game that let him use his keen knowledge of history and literature, and he loved to win. That was Bob.

~Charles Kerlin, Ph.D., Professor of English

Dr. Robert J. Garrity will always be a part of the SJC community. His wisdom and enthusiasm endeared him to generations of SJC students. Although he has passed, some of the alumni would like to pass on their favorite memory of Dr. Garrity in the hope that future SJC generations will understand the loss SJC has suffered.

My favorite memory of Dr. Garrity happens in the hallway of the Core building. Two friends and I, all of us in Dr. Garrity's Shakespeare class, were sitting in the hall waiting for our next class. Dr. Garrity walks by us and pushes the button for the elevator. He then proceeds to look down at us with a strange little smile and says, "When shall we three meet again? In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" The elevator door dings, and he walks in. "Did he just call us witches?" I ask as the doors to the elevator close on his maniacal cackle.

~Elizabeth Gray

My favorite Dr. Garrity moment happened when I was 9. My mom had a meeting with him, and had brought me with. I spent the meeting sitting in his office reading Shel Silverstein. At the end of the meeting he turns to me and asks "Has anyone ever taught you how to read poetry?" When I told him no, he took the book from me and explained how poetry should be read. He then, with all the gravity and seriousness one would use to read one of Shakespeare sonnets, proceeded to read the poems aloud for me, before coaching me through some of the shorter ones. I've enjoyed poetry ever since.

~Erica Brown

In a Shakespeare class, the class was talking about Romeo and Juliet. One young woman declared that the pair were "emo." Upon which, Dr. Garrity gave the girl a confused look and asked, "What is emo?" A good portion of the class was spent listening to Mike Koscielnny explaining what the label "emo" meant. Dr. Garrity listened with all the gravity of someone explaining a hidden depth of a Shakespearean Sonnet.

~Roxie Kooi

My favorite Dr. Garrity memory was from the Shakespeare class (if I have to choose one). He had wanted to use the time otherwise, but we talked him into a game of jeopardy of sorts to help prepare us for his final. We split into teams and raced back and forth to the board with our answers, most of which would never see the page of the test. It was still so much fun and awesome. By the way, I'm pretty sure my team won.

~Sabrina (Butts) Esper

My favorite memory of Dr. Garrity is from my senior year when I took an independent study with him because I'd already taken both classes he was teach that semester. We spent half the semester on Tess of the D'Urbervilles, which was expected as it was his favorite novel. The next class we met after I had finished it, he asked me what I thought of the novel, and looking him straight in the eye, I told him that hadn't enjoyed it at all, and the only character I had any sympathy for was the man who could loosely be called the villain, or Alex Stokes D'Urberville for those who know the story. Without batting an eye, Dr. Garrity asked me why I felt that way about the story and the characters, and listened very patiently and without emotion while I dragged his favorite novel through the mud. At the end of my rant, he just smiled a little, looked me in the eye, and said, "I agree with you." We spent the rest of the hour discussing the novel as he loved to do. It was definitely one of the best classes I'd ever had.

~Sandra Blum

Dr. Garrity, during a Shakespeare class, explained that he puts his grocery lists into sonnets so he can remember them.

~Jennifer (Ruff) Ledford

Sadly, I've only had one class with this amazing fountain of [useful] knowledge. I also have no specifics, but in his Core 3 class I believe, I got a taste of his unbelievable language skills and passion for history. Greece and Rome are two of my favorite ancient societies. Even the rest of ancient Europe became intensely interesting through his lessons. That sheer volume of knowledge is a seriously under-appreciated talent/quality/skill.

~Scott Ripberger

In the same day, two different English classes mentioned Mark Twain. Dr. Kerlin asserted that Mark

Twain was racist. An hour later, Dr. Garrity claimed that Mark Twain was NOT racist and it was the language of his era that made him appear so. In response to this, the members of both classes decided to suggest a debate about 19th century American Lit--focus being the depiction of African Americans, particularly in Mark Twain-- between Garrity and Charlie, proctored by Maia (Kingman) Hawthorne and judged by April Toadvine. We even created a tagline for the poster, "There will be blood... and ink."

~Roxie Kooi

As typically occurs at times like these, my friends have been contributing their own memories and reminiscence. Author Bernard Sell, a student of Dr. Garrity's classes in Latin, recalls trying to explain pop culture concepts to the professor. "I loved how befuddled he got when you tried to clue him in on pop culture," Sell said on Facebook. "He'd try for a little bit, and then he'd give that wincing grin that said "Well, the ancient Greeks and Romans didn't bother with this, so why should I?" My friend Armando once recalled Dr. Garrity speaking of the Library at Alexandria and the look of frustrated agony on the man's face as he lamented what knowledge was lost when the library met its end. That's the kind of scholar that he was. Me? I remember him doing readings from the Bible at Easter Vigil mass. He usually read from the Book of Exodus, letting loose with those vocal pipes he had honed after years of theater. "Pharaoh's chariots and charioteers..." Shook the whole church. I also will remember him as a teacher who first sparked me to think about what motivated a writer and why a writer makes the choices that she/he does.

~Jon Nichols

One of the most memorable moments for many people was a story told by Dr. Garrity himself. Dr. Garrity was presiding over a Graduation ceremony at Saint Joseph's College. The valedictorian had been leaning back in his seat so only two of the chairs legs were on the raised platform. As Dr. Garrity was speaking, he noticed the valedictorian had lost his balance and was falling backwards. He turned, and raced towards the valedictorian to try and catch him, his black academic robes billowing behind him as he dived off the stage. In Dr. Garrity's own words, "I looked just like Batman." To this day, you will still hear certain alumni sing, "Na na na na na na GARRITY!"

~Jennifer (Ruff) Ledford & Roxie Kooi & Elizabeth Gray & Scott Ripberger

With all love and respect, the SJC alumni and community wish to express our sorrow at the loss of Dr. Garrity. Dr. Garrity, your loss will echo in us forever. Thank you, Dr. Garrity. Rest well.

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Involved For Life

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This year, Rensselaer Central High School and Saint Joseph's College teamed up for the first time to encourage Creative Writing in high school students. Working with Brenda Greene, the *Measure* staff created a competition for the high school students. Several pieces were submitted, and those that follow are the winners of the first RCHS and SJC Creative Writing Competition!

A Nanny's Child

Amanda Hickman

Innocence starts his day,
out of bed with barely a peep.
His face lights up, his eye catches mine,
as he wipes away the sleep.

Mischief fills his day:
rocks, dirt, making a mess.
How small the sins of a child,
how cute when they confess.

Exhausted he ends his day,
dreams fill his head.
With blanket in hand, I carry him in,
and softly lay him in his bed.

Hero

Alissandra Potts

We hear about men abusing their wives and children committing suicide because of bullying. We see meth houses blowing up and terrorist attacks. We read about drug busts and, on one occasion, a man eating another's face because of the use of bath salts. The world is a scary place full of equally scary people, but it is also filled with heroes.

--

I sat in the lunch room, eating with my chums. The intoxicating smell of pizza wafted up my nostrils. I shivered in delight as I took the first bite. The cheese melted in my mouth and a stray dab of sauce dripped slightly from the corner of my mouth before I captured it with my tongue. The spicy pepperoni burned my taste buds. I closed my eyes as I savored the tiny taste of heaven. Conversation moved around me. In short spurts, phrases filtered through my ears. Talk of classes, jokes, and gossip mastered our table, but nothing could tear me from my slice of happiness.

I shivered as a chill tickled up my spine. The hair on the nape of my neck stood on end. Someone was watching me, I could feel it. I opened my eyes and scanned the faces in front of me. None of them were even facing me. Slowly my eyes trailed across the large lecture hall trying to locate those eyes. In the second row from the top, I spotted the culprits staring at me. I should have known. Those two had been following me everywhere. Every time I turned around, one of them seemed to be nearby. At first, I told myself that it was just a coincidence. They just happened to be outside my classes everyday. But I knew it was no coincidence.

One of them was Mark Mason. I wasn't sure how old he was. I didn't know anything about him, but I recognized the other one. His name was Kevin Black, a junior. He was a few inches short of being six feet tall and had the body of a wrestler. His shoulders were broad and his muscles bulged against his T-shirt. His sandy hair swept across his forehead just above his eyes. They met mine. A smile spread across his face, one that could melt other girls into a limp noodle, but made me cringe with disgust and look away.

"Delaney!" I hissed urgently.

My twin sister and a couple of other friends turned and looked at me. They all crowded the two of us. Delaney's green eyes held concern as she opened her mouth to talk, but I interrupted.

"They're staring again." I murmured to the group.

In unison, they all exclaimed, "Ohh!" Then one by one, they took turns glancing over their shoulders to capture a look at who we all called "my stalker."

"That's really creepy." Charlotte Bosat whispered. She flipped her brown hair over her shoulder and leaned her elbow on the table. They all looked at me, trying to mask the fear in their eyes, but it was there all the same.

"Yeah." I went back to eating my pizza. It was cold now, but I didn't care. I had other things on my mind.

--

The school year drew to a close and things weren't letting up. One specific day, Delaney stayed at the school for play practice, so I rode the bus home by myself. I stepped off the bottom stair onto my driveway and started the long journey to the house. The rain had softened the ground, causing me to sink with every step. I looked behind me and saw only the imprints of my shoes in the gravel. I had a feeling that someone was following me again. A chill ran up my spine and I shivered. Goosebumps pebbled my arm.

My house keys jangled against my side and I picked up the pace and ran towards my house, my sanctuary. I was scared. The rain pelted down on me as I neared the back door. Before I rounded the corner, I looked back to make sure no one was following me. There was nothing. The rain fell around me while I examined the landscape. Trees were bending frighteningly low. They looked as though they would be ripped from the ground by their roots, but there was no sign of a human out there.

I turned and sprinted behind the house. My shoes scraped the concrete as I raced up the steps towards the bright red door. I placed my keys in the lock and turned it as quickly as my anxious fingers would let me. When I turned the knob, the wind blew the door open and me in after it. I fought to close it, panic rising as I struggled. I finally closed it, latched it, and turned the lock with trembling hands. I sunk to the floor, my back against the door. My heart pounded against my ribcage. I was paranoid. There was no way those boys would follow me home, but then again they seemed to be following me everywhere. It bothered me, the staring and the disgusting smirk on Kevin Black's face.

My mind raced, trying to lose the image. I needed a distraction. My body shook with fright. I was scared for my life, but I didn't know how to make him leave me alone. Lightening lit up the sky

and thunder followed almost immediately. I practically jumped out of my skin.

“Isla?”

I looked up and saw my brother Jake standing at the top of the stairs, a half-eaten apple in his hand. He took another bite and looked at me with concern. It was now or never.

“Jake, do you know Kevin Black and Mark Mason?” I could feel tears stinging my eyes, trying to escape, but I couldn’t cry, not now.

“Yes. Why?”

I sat there looking up at him. The tears were still threatening. “Well ... they’ve been sort of bothering me. Quite a bit. Actually, they’ve been bothering me a lot. It’s to the point of stalking.”

The look in his eyes scared me. It was a mixture of hatred and determination. I had no idea what was running through his head. I slowly folded my legs under me and interrupted his thoughts with a cough. His eyes snapped back to reality. Fire blazed there. The apple looked like it was about to be turned into sauce in his hand.

“I’ll take care of it.” This five words that doomed us all.

--

I kept fidgeting throughout Geometry the next day. The clock’s second hand seemed to have slowed down dramatically and class was dragging by at a snail’s pace. It didn’t help that I had to go to the bathroom. Mr. Michels stood in the front of the room, drawing triangles on the white board. Students around me were sleeping. There was still half the class left and I felt like I was going to die.

“Mr. Michels?” I raised my hand. I couldn’t wait any longer.

“Yes?”

“May I go to the restroom?”

“Take the hall pass.”

I breathed a sigh of relief, jumped up, and made sure to grab the pass before I slipped through the door. I ran to the bathroom. It seemed to move farther ahead with every step. I was almost there when I heard voices filtering through the halls, hushed warnings. My curiosity got the best of me and I forgot about my original mission. I stepped around the brick corner. My fingers curled around the edge and I peered around to find the source of the noise. I choked out a gasp. Jake stood facing Kevin, whose back was to me.

“You need to leave my sister alone.” Jake stood his ground, not altering his stance in the slightest. He meant it and my heart wrenched. He cared.

“Why? What are you going to do?” Unfortunately, Kevin stood his ground as well.

“You’ll leave her alone or something bad is going to happen.” He turned and started walking away.

But Kevin wasn’t finished. He something from his sweatshirt. I didn’t see it until it was too late. He pulled the trigger of the gun and the bullet sailed through Jake’s head. He crumpled to the floor with a thud. Blood pooled around his head.

Doors opened and people ran towards us. I screamed in horror. Kevin turned at me scream and held the gun even tighter. The sun glinted off the metal and ricocheted into my eyes. I looked away and ran over to Jake. He laid there, lifeless, and I kneeled next to his body. Blood soaked through my jeans but I didn’t notice. Tears burst from my eyes and soaked my cheeks. I sat there for long minutes, focused only on my brother. I saw movement in the corner of my eye. I glanced over just long enough to see Jake’s chest move. I couldn’t believe my eyes. My breathing quickened and I laid two fingers on his neck. I felt a pulse under my touch. I looked up at the swarm of teachers and students that had gathered around us. “He’s still alive!”

Horrific Hierarchies Of Hell

Brooks Rodibaugh

All my life, my character was a mess,
stealing, murdering, lying, and
my actions needed some address.

I was caught one day in a fire,
burned badly and sent to the hospital.
Was it my turn to finally retire?

I slipped into a coma and reflected.
Would I ever return, to redress my wrongs?
Would I become one of Lucifer's selected?

Odysseus the Witty came to me and stated:
"Brooks, you have lived a wicked life, but I have come
to show you that your fate can be emancipated."

And to Hell we went, starting with the Capricious and Arbitrary
for these people reside here because they cannot make up their minds.
They refuse to fight any adversary.

Their bodies are tied upon a string and moved like the tide,
Flowing and floating, cast up and down like a yo-yo,
they drift back and forth and refuse to choose a side.

"You see, Brooks, the souls are neither good nor evil,
But rest in the middle, floating through life like jellyfish.
They will never try to escape, even if they could.

Over there are Benedict Arnold and Robert E. Lee.
When it came to battle, they took too long to choose.
Now that they are here, their eyes are open to see.”

We descended further and to the second level we came.
The Sullen and Morose are sentenced here,
always depressed and entrapped by shame.

Their punishment is quite great:
good things are placed all around them; sun, life, happiness.
Sadly, they lack the ability to enjoy and appreciate.

Here we find people like Edgar Allen Poe.
His famous works are a clue
to why his outlook on life was quite low.

He is reunited with Annabel,
released from her cold, stone sarcophagus.
But she is blind and deaf, for these are gifts from Hell

Further down we go and my stomach begins to growl.
We come to the level of the Hungry: of people, attention, money, and possessions.
Lust, greed, and jealousy are the ingredients to make a stomach howl.

We find the jealous, greedy, and lustful.
They are starved and starved, but do not die.
They suffer endlessly because they were not thankful,

for what they had in their pile.
People like Lancelot and Julius Caesar,
so hungry for love and power, they could not control their desire.

It is time to go; there are many more levels to explore.
Up next are the Slanderers: the liars and gossipers.
They try to make prior engagements sore.

These instigators are driven crazy by mosquitoes
constantly buzzing in their ears; trying to
teach them a lesson, about their creation of woes.

There goes Rosie O'Donnell, clutching at her ears.
Similar to a mosquito buzzing in your ear
she may learn as it brings her to tears.

"Do take note that the further you go,
the punishments grow far worse.
We still have much to travel, a consequence of the life you've sown."

Up next, we see the Hypocrites
who preach one thing, and live by another.
These are one of the most hated and cause many fits.

Their bodies move at two different points.
When one leg attempts to move forward, the other backwards.
They gradually split themselves apart at various joints.

Lindsay Lohan and Mark Antony are found together.
She says she will try harder, and Antony offers his false cooperation,
but their sin sticks like a bur

Now listen to the great orator Mark Antony, for he has a story
that we can all concur
is the ultimate act of hypocrisy.

“Julius Caesar was my friend
until he was brutally murdered
by the hands that his friends lent.

In order to save my life,
I offered my cooperation and devotion until
the senators left, for trust is a double sided knife.

I tricked them, I tricked them, I say.
My speech stirred the crowd and caused a riot
for my words formed them like clay.”

Moving on, we cross paths with the Manipulators.
For this is where I first resided,
where I tricked many people’s cores.

We find Charles Ponzi and his masterful scheme,
for his cruel manipulation of others
resulted in his wealth for his team

Perhaps the greatest manipulation, the greatest feat,
was the invention of the Trojan Horse,
which burned the city of Troy and took the king off his seat

“I can roam all of hell now,
because I was able to trick my guardian, King Hammurabi,
King of law and order, I made him question how.

But you must be wondering,
What was my punishment?
I was turned into clay

King Hammurabi molds me however he may wish.
I feel all the pain of twisting and turning,
and could not take any more of the anguish

I gave him an ultimatum,
that if he failed at solving my riddle, he would let me roam,
all of hell, free of pain and granted freedom.

He failed and now you see
what is dark, ominous, and cries for help?
My riddle made a fool of ye.

A very good try; he gave his answer proud.
He stated: the people of hell.
But I tricked him, for the true answer was a thundercloud.

Now I roam all of this land.
Free of pain, but freeing others of certain pain as well,
I show them their afterlife already planned.”

We still have a bit to embark.
Following the Manipulators are the Corrupt.
Taking bribes and influence is their trademark.

The governors of Illinois, including Rod Blagojevich,
enjoy a life as a biology class amphibian,
being dissected and taken out of their niche.

We are coming to the worst levels:
the Misanthropes and Murderers.
Genocidal leaders, John Wilkes Booth, and Ivan the Terrible may all be devils.

People like Saddam Hussein, Shaka Zulu, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin
may have hated parts of mankind, but
now they are the ones that have fallen.

Buried alive and not resting in peace
since they sent so many people to open graves,
their punishment and pain will never cease

For the death they caused of others
transfers to their friends and family as pain and grief;
especially for their lovers.

Transitioning to the next level
is quite a feat,
for this is the last and home to the devil

Residing here are the Sadists, the worst to measure
the sickest of them all.
Watching others suffer is their pleasure.

Their punishment is the greatest, the absence of all mirth.
They are transformed into voodoo dolls
and left to feel all the suffering and pain on the earth.

Dr. Mengele and Jack the Ripper
now know the true definition of pain
because they have experienced suffering far past what they caused, much bigger.

"I have brought you all the way down
because this could be the life
that you continue to lead and you will drown.

Consider your journey
and my wisdom.
Now awake and return to the gurney.”

Six months in a daze,
I realize what changes must be made.
This part of my life shall become nothing but a phase.

Enlightenment
Brooks Rodibaugh



Air War

Michael Thoele, '63

Gary Nagel had the DC-6 lined up on final when the word changed. Through the afternoon's heat, he had been working a stubborn fire on a timbered ridge twenty miles out of Santa Rosa. He had measured his way down the ridge, extending the thin red line of retardant a quarter of a mile eastward with each sortie. On long, thundering passes, the four-engine DC-6 had skimmed the treetops at fifty feet. Below, the fire gnawed its way up the ridge's south face, exhaling billows of smoke five thousand feet into a blue California sky. Nagel had caught glimpses of the ground firefighters and their engines, laboring up the roads along the ridge and moving in to pick up the fire. And he'd seen that the retardant line was working, slowing the fire, offering the ground crews a shot at corralling it.

Nagel and his copilot, Ted Bell, had been on the fire for a little more than an hour. They made their runs down the ridge and winged quickly back to the airfield tanker base, where the loading crew, sweating in retardant-soaked coveralls, would race to pump in another twenty-five hundred gallons of red muck. Then it was up in the air again, picking up orders from Blaine Moore, the Forest Service air attack coordinator. Riding as a passenger in a small plane circling high overhead, Moore was a flying air traffic controller and fire boss, running the air operation while using his radio and his vantage point to steer the ground firefighters into action. As tanker operations go, this was an easy day. Chasing fire along ridgelines seldom demands as much as chasing it into canyons. There would be other days for flying the canyons. This was a day for working on top.

With a lifetime of passenger service behind it, the DC-6 was a flying cavern. Back of the cockpit, the cabin had been stripped of every seat, restroom, luggage rack, reading light and amenity. Riveted onto the ship's underbelly, the protruding paunch of the retardant tank made the old plane look more like a pelican, less like an eagle. Beneath the floor ran the valving and controls that actuated the six clamshell doors along the tank's bottom. Whatever milk runs it had known during its first life with United Airlines, the red-striped DC-6 was a ten-thousand-horsepower warship now, born again as a low altitude bomber and sent off to find adventure in its old age. In Nagel, sitting at the controls and wearing his customary sunglasses, it even had a one-time Air Force bomber pilot.

On Moore's word, Nagel and Bell set off down the ridge. Below them, the ribbon of red retardant draped through a meadow and over trees and brush just ahead of the fire's advancing front. Feeding power and flap settings to Bell over the radio, Nagel began jockeying the plane on line over the stripe. He was on final approach now, dropping and slowing, lining up as if he were making a

landing at some familiar airport. He would come to minimum altitude, punch off the drop doors with the button beneath his left thumb on the steering yoke, and extend the line. But then Moore's voice crackled on the radio. He'd been watching the fire's progress, noting its behavior on the far flank. It looked as if they'd headed it now, he was saying. Instead of extending the retardant line straight ahead, could Nagel bend it — throw a sharp turn and swing the line to the south? Nagel understood. They'd caught the fire's front. Now it was time to turn the corner and seal the flank. His reply was quick. No problem.

It was Nagel's practice to do a reconnaissance flyover on any new course assignment. Go around once, take a look at the new target, and then come back and do the drop. But here, on the ridgeline, it seemed unnecessary. He'd already brought the plane down low. He was coming up on the new line. The territory was familiar. He rolled the DC-6 into the sort of tight, banked turn it had never known in its passenger days. Coming out of the turn, he dropped toward the treetops and brought the plane in on a new line. Just in time to start the drop. No waste motion. Nagel thumbed the button on the steering yoke and felt the first three drop-doors open. He knew that he'd caught the end of the line, that the red ribbon would have a ninety-degree bend the next time he saw it. A second later he punched off the final three doors. And then the DC-6 plunged into the smoke.

In his circling of the fire, Moore, the air attack boss, had noticed a patriarchal pine that towered above all others on the ridge, a stalagmite of green needling into the sky. A survivor, most



Tanker planes roaring at improbably low altitudes over rugged mountain terrain are a summertime spectacle in the West. Piloting them is one of America's most dangerous jobs. Photo by Tony Sleznick.

likely, of fires or logging that had cleared the ridge in some earlier time. It stood now just against the roiling smoke that climbed from the ridge, like an evergreen bough nailed to the side of a cloud. From somewhere behind the smoke, Nagel was approaching.

Federal air tanker safety regulations say that pilots of retardant bombers will not fly in smoke. Routinely they will fly around towering smoke columns, like small boys romping around the legs of tall uncles. They will work in conditions where visibility skitters near the legal minimum. But they will not, the regulations declare, fly into the sort of smoke that drapes the windshield like a coat of gray paint. Every tanker pilot does it, of course, though not always deliberately. The updraft of big fire creates its own wind patterns. Smoke ebbs and flows in a choreography all its own. For a plane winging through a forest's atmospheric mosaic at over a hundred miles an hour, minimum visibility can become zero visibility in an instant. The experience usually is fleeting, over as quickly as it began, like passing through a short tunnel on a speeding train. Hold the course or climb a bit. Pop out on the other side.

Nagel flies in the smoke now. Moving fast. Visibility falling to zero. Gray, gray, gray against the windshield. Surfing through an acrid cloud, red retardant streaming out the open drop doors. Beside him, Bell, locked on the instruments, jacks the power to maximum for the climb out. Nagel looking up now from watching the ground and punching off the load. Leaning to his right to throw the flaps to twenty degrees. Shifting from action to reaction. Windshield gray, gray, now thinning slightly, coming out. Suddenly green, green, green, a wall of green. At a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour the plane hits the pine seventy feet below its top.

In that second, Nagel's world detonates. Sensations and pain and demands avalanche upon him. The plane takes the tree head-on, dead center on the fuselage. Up ahead of Nagel's feet, the ship's nose cone disappears. The front landing gear doors and other chunks of hardware rip away, spinning toward the ground. The windshield panel directly before him implodes, its shrapnel ricocheting off his sunglasses, nibbling into his face. The window opening is small, barely two feet square. But through it, as if fed by some giant mechanical chipping machine, rushes a cataract of limbs, needles, pitch, branches, bark, pine cones, wood chunks. A firewood-sized billet rockets past Nagel's head, crunches the bulkhead behind him and caroms forward to take out the gauges on the instrument panel. The DC-6 suddenly loses power.

But somehow they are still flying. At over a hundred miles an hour, the wind screams through the missing window. Nagel and Bell sit hip deep in a sea of greenery that overflows from the cockpit into the cabin behind them. Splintery ingots of wood are scattered through the pile. Every one of them has come past Nagel's head. Because he was leaning to the side at the moment of impact, not a

one has hit him.

Bell clutches his eyes. The wind and airborne detritus have spun his contact lenses up and back, behind his eyelids. He is effectively blind. The DC-6 is dropping now. At Nagel's knee, a hulking wood chunk had wedged the throttles closed. Frantically, he digs through needles and branches, claws the two-foot chunk out, shoves the throttles forward. Engines two and three, the power plants nearest the fuselage, are knocked out, clogged with debris. But one and four respond. Crippled but not felled, the DC-6 claws upward.

The wind knifing through the window is brutal, but when Nagel sees the alternative he is grateful. In front of Bell, the right window is a gummy, opaque pastiche of pine pitch and needles. Bell gropes and finds the microphone. Nagel tends to a hundred details, reads his remaining instruments, tries to make sense of the chaos. Bell raises Moore on the radio and transmits the vital information: They've hit a tree, two engines gone, two responding, trying to fly it back to Santa Rosa. Moore watches them go, limping off toward the south. He radios the tower.

The crash trucks waited as they landed. Despite the damage, the landing gear deployed and locked normally. The ground crew gaped, and not just at the plane's battered nose and missing windshield. When the DC-6 struck the pine, the tree's top had snapped off and whipped down the side of the airplane. The base lodged at the foot of the wing, and the treetop laid down, paralleling the fuselage. When Nagel brought the plane into Santa Rosa it was carrying a forty-foot Christmas tree, like a ladder slung on the side of a truck. At the hospital, the doctors dug the glass out of Nagel's face and extricated the contact lenses from Bell's eyes. Nagel was cleared to go. His DC-6 would need some work before it fought again. But fire season was on. Nagel caught a ride going north. The next day he was in Oregon, flying another plane on another fire.

Talking With God

John L. Madden, '64

Putting the prayer book aside,
I sat in silence:
waiting for something,
or someone,
to share the stillness with me.

Unfettered by a plan
or even expectation,
I was free
to say nothing;
to do nothing;
to think nothing;
to be nothing.

Soon a presence
seemed to surround me:

“Is that you, God?” I called.
“I’m so glad to be with you.”
“I’ve missed you, my Love – welcome!”

There was no reply;
only silence.
I felt ignored;
I was annoyed.

But then I remembered:
the language of God is silence.
When God speaks –
if God speaks –

He speaks to me
in my own words.

Always most courteous,
God never
presumes to intrude,
but waits for me
to initiate the conversation —
then permits me to believe
that I am leading it.

Reflections on a Summer Morning

John L. Madden, '64

It's the beginning of summer at the beach.
The sounds of children playing by the sea
 mingle with the noises on the boardwalk;
The vendors hawk ice cream, funnel cakes
 and assorted clothing;
Policemen, rented for the season, walk in pairs,
 trying hard to look like the mature veterans they are not.

An older couple holds hands
 and strolls amid the memories of bygone summers;
A group of youths darts
 among the still pale crowd
 that moves purposely from one concession to the next;
Horns sound from the cars
 trying to edge through relentless traffic –
And everyone is doing their best
 to get it right and have some fun. . . .

Suddenly I notice a man
 sitting alone on one of those boardwalk benches.
He's gazing out over the beach,
 past the playing children and still-pale-people
 on towels and folding chairs,
And seems to be looking far
 into the endless ocean that stretches
 to the distant horizon.
He sits motionless, apparently
 unaware of the excitement all around him.

In this brief interlude
 on a bustling boardwalk,
Punctuated with egg and pork roll sandwiches,
 laughing children and harried vacationers,
I ponder how one person
 can transcend the frenzy
And look beyond the swirling maelstrom.

Then it hits me,
 like the cool spray of a breaking wave:
Motion and stillness
 are not mutually exclusive.
Each joins the other
 to complete the circle;
Each weaves in and out
 to form the tapestry of life.

Citrus

Nicole Thomsen

A week before my nineteenth birthday we got the news. Kidneys were failing; emphysema got worse, her will was gone.

She would have loved the drive. Twenty-Four West was beautiful. It was home to her. Tennessee dirt farm, that's where Gram came from. The rolling hills and moss covered mountains; why would she leave this for Chicago? The blue sky faded to a lime-like yellow, to sunset orange, to puppy love pink. The pink turned into the lavender lilacs that grazed the roads. I could still see the silhouette of horses before night fell. In Chicago you see two stars and one moon. It's dimly lit a musky orange, never dark because of those city lights. On route Twenty-Four the stars are blinding. The moon is so white it almost looks blue. Beautiful and dark. God it was dark, head lights didn't help, only the stars hinted what turn would be next.

Twenty-seven hours and we were finally there; St. Petersburg, Florida. I'd been here every summer for the last six years. Gram had only been here for two. My only thoughts were, "I hope I never get to her stage." Paralyzed from the waist down, brain rotting, living off a tank, this is what was left of my Grandmother. I said hi, but I doubt she remembered who I was. I wonder what it's like for my mom to see her like this? I don't want to stare at her so I go outside.

Spring's hot breath greeted me with a whisper. Back home it was forty degrees, here in St. Pete it is eighty-seven. I slid out of my sandals and put my bare feet in the grass. I loved that feeling. The thick, almost plastic layers of green with a mixture of pebbles and sand engulfed my feet. I remember when fire ants first started attacking people. I was scared to death to go near the grass back then. That was ten years ago. That fear died with my adolescence. I loved knowing I was the center of attention. Behind every palm tree, on the canopy railings, under the shed ceiling and in between any nook, the lizards were watching me. I can count twelve. There's a baby one, the size my big toe, staring at me from the hammock. Ahh, the hammock. The worst place to take a nap, yet the perfect spot to get third degree sunburn. The above ground pool was more faded than last year. The bees and bugs have invaded its parameters, floating on the surface, waiting for a rescue that would never come.

The palm trees never get old; strong and bold, their green so lively blowing in the humid breeze. No wonder all the old people flock here for retirement. Even the Spanish moss is breathtaking. I wish I could call this place home. But if it were home, I couldn't really consider it paradise. As I'm getting ready to go in, I notice something sprouting just over the fence. Was that

here last year?

The sweet scent draws me in. Contrasting colors, glowing orange and jade green. I pick one. Rolling it through my hands, I absorbed its familiar texture. “Hey Gram, look what I found.” She attempts to grasp it from my hands but her arms are too frail. I place it in her lap. A ringing suddenly catches my attention. It’s her heart monitor. Her pulse was rising. Was she allergic? It was just an orange. In between heavy breaths she mumbled, “Citrus, sweet citrus.”

“What’s sweet citrus Gram?” I repeated. Her response, “Darling, did I ever tell you about your great grandfather?” She knew who I was. Or at least she knew I was one of her grandchildren. Before I could respond, she began again.

“I was raised in Tennessee. Now, your great grandmother had me out of wedlock,” her voice was soft and hoarse, “Do you know what that means?” I nod my head. “When I was a child that was not commonly accepted. They tried to send us away but your great grandmother stood her ground.” She was so out of breath I wanted to stop her but she didn’t pause long enough for me to cut in. “When I was about eight, a man came up to me. He got down on one knee and asked me about my dress. He told me it was pretty and said ‘You have your mother’s indigo eyes.’ Then he handed me a bag of oranges and walked away. A bag of oranges back then was a lot, honey.” Her pulse was starting to spike again, and I began to cut in but she continued anyway, “As he walked away my mother whispered to me, ‘That’s your father.’ This scent always takes me back.”

I knew what she was going say, and we said it together, “Citrus, sweet citrus.”

Midnight Serenade

Amanda Rosseau

Midnight Serenade
Endless Symphony
a playful soliloquy
full of sound

Restless Warrior
Now's the part
where moonlight's lore
resides upon your open heart

Be you not brave
be you not smart
still so young, naive
and full of heart

Lungs of fire
can melt away
a soul of ice
for a day

The Worth of Cogs

Katie Guernsey

Every day
Cogsworth went to work.

Days of the week
didn't even matter to him.

The only thing he
ever did was work.
Because if he didn't,
he knew that everything
would fall apart.

Some days he would
dream of the country.
The tall grass he could lie in
and be lost,
the fresh air he could
breathe for days.

But he'd only ever seen
pictures and heard words.

And maybe the country
wasn't so great.
The country seemed to
have a beautiful sadness to it.
Like it was trying so hard to be
happy that it never could.

But these were just dreams.

He could never go.
He had a job to do.

So Cogsworth kept
going to work.
He had to.
Every day.

But Cogsworth wasn't
happy.
And he knew he
never would be.

Not in that place.
Not there.
Not working every day.

The country, Cogsworth thought,
may be sad.
But being so beautifully sad
has to be better than
sitting here all day in this
machine.

So Cogsworth stood up.
And nothing happened.
So he turned, and he
walked out.

As he walked away
he heard an eery clinking noise,
trying to lure him back in.

He knew what the noise was.
Things were falling apart.

Cogsworth began to run.
He could see the country.
He was actually breathing
for the first time ever.

Behind him, Cogsworth
heard chaos erupt.
The noises – the clanking,
the whirring, the awful grinding.

But he didn't look back.

He just kept running
until he felt the
grass and the dirt and
the wind.

Then Cogsworth stopped.
He turned around.

Everything behind him was
falling apart.
And then, suddenly the sky was
roaring, but Cogsworth knew
there was nothing he could do.

And then the world got
strangely quiet.
Then before Cogsworth could
take another breath,

there was a momentous
explosion.

Cogsworth was blasted back
as the machine collapsed.
Bits and pieces of the only
world Cogsworth knew
fell around him.

As the last bits of
shrapnel fell,
Cogsworth stood up.
And he was sad.

But he could look far away
and he could see
more of the country.
And it reminded him of all
that is extraordinary
and all that is beautiful.

So Cogsworth turned his
back to the machine.

He began to walk
toward the open country.
He stepped over the
bits and pieces –
the leftovers of the
machine he'd been a
part of his entire life.

Cogsworth knew what

he had done.

He was just one tiny part
of that machine,
but without him the
machine had collapsed.

Cogsworth said out loud,
to the lonely countryside,
I collapsed the machine.

Cogsworth had collapsed
the machine.
Everything had fallen apart.

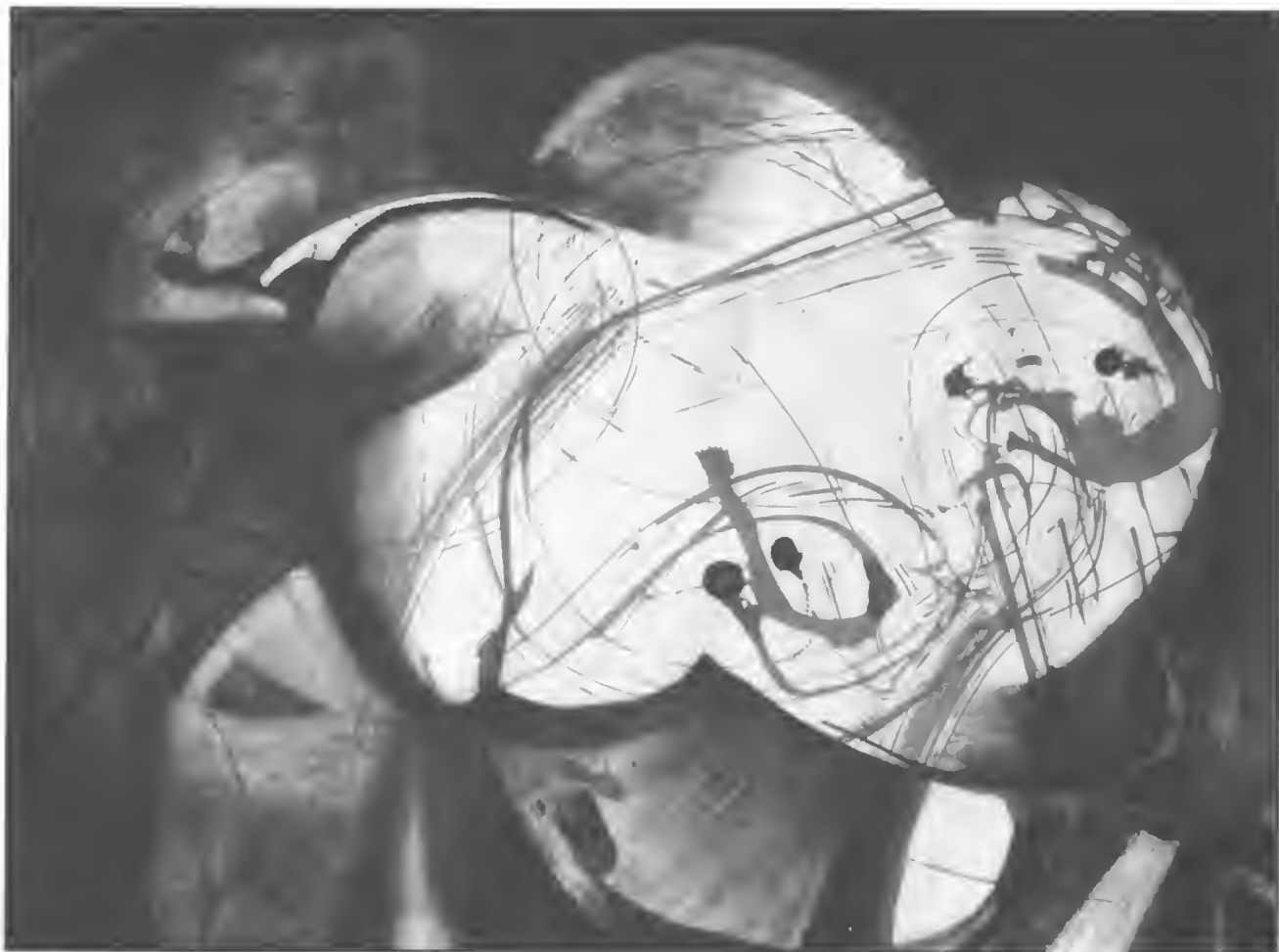
And Cogsworth was sad.

Because the country
was new, and the country
was lonely.

But Cogsworth knew
that he had the power
to destroy that machine.

And he could do it again.

Because he wasn't just
another part of the machine.



It's Not What You Think It Is
Kristina Hemmerling

Compliance

Alex Yong

“And you are sure that it is the nanites, and not your disregard of taking your medication that is causing these hallucinations, Mr. Abbott?” my doctor condescendingly asked.

I gritted my teeth and muttered, “Yes.”

The doctor pursed his lips and scribbled something down on his notepad. He said to me in a very annoying professional-type voice, “Mr. Abbott, this drug has been proven time and time again to suppress any hallucination caused by...” he paused for a moment, “your disorder. And as for,”—he tapped me on the arm with his pen; I recoiled back almost instantly—“those little robots in your bloodstream, the nanites if you want to be precise, they have never been shown to cause any form of hallucinations. It would be impossible! The ones in your body are not designed to interact with any section of the brain.”

I took a deep breath and said, “Look Doc, when I was on those pills, the hallucinations were still there. I could still see the flashes and hear those voices. The only thing those damn pills did was make me sick to my stomach. As for the nanites, this never happened until I got them put in.” The doctor slowly shook his head and scribbled down another note, “Again Mr. Abbott, the nanites in your blood are not designed for audio-visual modification, they are designed for —” I stood up angrily, “I know what they are designed for! I also know my own body! Those pills you gave me sir? They. Do. Nothing. The nanites in my blood? Never had a problem until they got put in.”

The doctor motioned for me to sit down, but I stayed standing.

“I don’t know what you want me to tell you Mr. Abbott,” the doctor said. “Even if I did believe that they should be removed, my word is only medical advice, not an official order. You would have to speak to the courts and receive their approval to remove them. However, considering the fact that the type of nanites in your body do not cause hallucinations, I see no reason to have them removed, and therefore I cannot, and will not, give medical advice regarding their removal. I banged my fist against the doctor’s desk. “Are you kidding me?” I yelled.

“Mr. Abbott, I will have to ask you to please settle down,” he said in an annoyingly calm voice.

I pounded both of my fists against his desk. “Settle down? Settle down?! I’m hearing voices in my head, seeing flashing lights, getting splitting headaches, people think I’m a whackjob ‘cause I’m twitching in public and hitting my head every time the voices take over! And you want me to

calm down? How am I supposed to calm down when no when is helping me out here?"

"I'm sorry Mr. Abbott, but you are wrong. The nanites are not doing this, it is you not taking your pills. If you want me to up the dosage..."

I slammed my fists even harder, "YOUR DAMN PILLS DON'T DO ANYTHING DOC, IT'S THE NANITES! I WANT THEM OUT!"

"I'm afraid that I cannot give that recommendation Mr. Abbott. There is no evidence, nor is it even possible for compliance nanites to cause hallucinations. Besides, your behavior is only reinforcing the fact that they are needed within you."

"WHAT IS IT THEN, DOC?"

"As I said before, you have a mental disorder, schizophrenia to be exact."

"I DO NOT HAVE FUCKING SCHIZOPHRENIA!"

The doctor raised his voice slightly, but was still annoyingly calm, "If you do not settle down Mr. Abbott, I will call security."

I had it. I flipped over the doctor's desk and continued to yell, "YOU WANT ME TO CALM DOWN? I'LL CALM DOWN WHEN YOU STOP BEING A STUCK-UP PRICK AND DO WHAT I'M PAYING YOU TO DO!"

The doctor blinked, and within moments, two security guards ran into the office. One grabbed my arm, and I threw a hook into the side of his face. His buddy didn't appreciate this, and before I could react, he slammed his fist into my gut, knocking the wind out of it. The other guard that I hit, now sporting a shiner, pulled out a small device, pointed it at me, and instantly, a sharp sensation filled my body, and I fell to the ground, writhing in pain.

Suddenly, the sounds from the room became faded, as I started to hear voices again. But this time, they were a bit more clear than usual. Sort of.

"The results show.." was all I could make out.

The guard hit the button again, and the pain and voices went away, but I was still pretty numb, from the one guard's fist, and from the nanites all taking a crap on my nervous system.

The doctor shook his head at me. "Mr. Abbott, it is the 23rd century, and yet we still have men like you acting like this."

If I could move, I would have flicked the stuck-up asshole off. Both guards lifted me up from the ground by my arms, the one I didn't punch out asked, "You want us to call the cops boss?" The doctor picked up his desk, along with a few of his possessions that had fallen off. "No, I think we have made our point here with Mr. Abbott. Jameson, when you are finished escorting him out, come back and I'll tend to that black eye. You will find that a few extra ameros will find themselves

into your paycheck for taking that blow.”

I was dragged out of the office, through the hospital hallways, where I received both looks of annoyance and surprise from both staff and patrons alike. The men continued to drag me out through the front doors and a good distance away from the front of the hospital, where they threw me out into the streets. The guard I had punched took a kick at my ribs, and the other used that same device on me again. Both of them laughed their asses off as squirmed in pain, but I could barely hear their laughter over the voice that popped up again.

“No, no...not worth it. Not with that personality.”

“Nature vs nurture...might have something we can use.”

The voices went away when they stopped a seconds afterwards. The guards walked off to the hospital, leaving me lying there, still numb and in pain from the guards’ blows. When I managed to stand up finally, a couple of minutes later, I pulled a pack of cigarettes from my coat, tapped one out, lit it, and gave my lungs a nice fill of imitation tobacco smoke.

Yum.

If that prick doctor was a smoker, I bet he was probably planning to buy himself a few packs of cigs or even cigars made with real tobacco with my hospital bill. What I wouldn’t give to have a real cigarette right now. But at a couple hundred merries a pack, probably not going to happen.

Whatever.

I walked slowly down the street, still puffing on my cigarette. A few advertising bots flew by my head, proudly announcing that some company was now accepting new applicants for the next ship out to the colonies. Voyage and living arrangements all paid for with seven years of service on the Segunda Oportunidad colony! Another one flew by offering me free samples of the latest nutrient block, Tastes just like real fruit! I swatted my hand at the bots, and they flew away pretty quickly.

I took another long drag from my cigarette as a ringing sensation built up in my ears, along with a flash of light. Hallucinations again. Jesus, I was going to need a drink after today.

I arrived at my favorite bar after a twenty-minute walk of dodging more ad bots and homeless people begging for a spare amero or a bit of food. The interior of the bar was dimly lit by a few overhead lights and a few neon lights on the wall. The air was thick with a mixture of mostly imitation tobacco smoke with a hint of real tobacco here and there. It was a bit more packed than normal, with groups of people surrounding the pool tables and jukeboxes, but I really didn’t mind. I settled into a barstool and waved down Marcus, the bartender.

“Yeah?”

“Beer please.”

“Brand?”

I asked for my favorite brand. “Draft if you have it.”

“Six merries.”

I plopped the cash on the counter. Marcus snatched it up, and dropped it into a register. He filled up a smudged mug with beer, and slid it my way. I took a large gulp and set it down, staring at the amber-colored liquid.

“Anything new Marc?” I asked.

Marcus shook his head. He was an older man. Tall, slightly balding, he was usually pretty quiet, only spoke when a patron needed something. He came from a long-line of military veterans and was proud of it. On the wall behind the bar, he had framed medals dating back to the First American Civil War, along with small, framed battle flags of the UN, old flags of the North American Union, and the former United States. There was an old photograph of his great-times-whatever grandfather posing with his squadmates back in one of the world wars.

I chugged the rest of my beer, pulled out some more cash for another, this time, ordering a slightly cheaper brand. Several drinks later, I had a decent buzz going, only slightly ruined by a few random blinking lights out of nowhere and small voice in my head that I couldn’t really even understand. Sounded like it was saying something about “right DNA”, and “he’ll go for it.” The hell? I pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and blew smoke rings towards the ceiling. I tapped the cig on the side of an ashtray, staring at the burning embers.

“Look, Randall...” I heard a woman say in a raised voice across the bar.

I turned my head. I saw a brown haired girl arguing with some man in the corner. When I looked closer, I saw that it was that one security guard from the hospital that had screwed with my nanites. He was arguing with this brown haired girl over something. I polished off my beer, left my cigarette in the ashtray, and walked on over to the table where he was at.

“Randall please!” she cried out.

The guard, fed up over whatever they were fighting about, pushed her. I then rushed over to the guard and slammed my fist into the side of his face.

“Uh oh.” I said, “I don’t see your little remote on you. Looks like it’s just you and your fists big boy.”

The guard took a swing at me, but I was ready for him this time. I side-stepped him, and sent another hook into his face, followed up with a swift kick to the side of his leg and the bastard fell to the ground in pain. I shoved him down on the ground and started to deliver some well-deserved blows to his face with my fists.

Suddenly, I felt a blow to the side of my ribs, and two bouncers grabbed me from behind, and dragged me out through the back door. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see some other bouncers drag the guard out as well.

I was once again on my butt, but at least the bouncers didn't take a few cheap shots at me while I was down. No, they pretty much just threw me on the ground and went back into the bar. I just sat there for a minute, when suddenly, the woman walked out of the bar towards me.

"Thanks for helping me out back there." she said to me.

"Anytime." I said.

She extended a hand to help me up. I took it.

"My name's Andrea." she said.

"Shane." I responded.

She smiled, "So, you know Randall?"

I chuckled with a shrug, "Sure, I guess you could say that. How do you know that douchebag?"

"Long story short, he's one of my mistakes that won't leave me alone." She noticed I was now limping a bit. The bouncers threw me against the ground harder than I thought, "Need some help walking?" she asked.

"Nah, I got it."

Her smile turned into a look of concern, "You sure?" I nodded, but she still insisted, "At least let me walk you back to wherever you need to get to."

"Sure."

My gait started to improve as we both started to walk down the street. However, as my wonderful luck would have it, a long ringing noise began to build up in my ears, along with random flashes of both dull colors and bright lights. I cringed in pain as my head started to ache from the noise.

"What's wrong?" Andrea asked.

"Just my leg, nothing major," I responded, I could tell she wasn't completely convinced, but before she could press on, I asked, "So, um...what's...uh...your job?"

I wanted to hit myself for the way I asked that question, but she answered, showing no sign that she noticed my awkwardness, "I'm a researcher at Ruby Connectivity. Nanotech division."

Was the world throwing me a bone here? I was about to ask her about compliance nanites and if they caused hallucinations, but I thought better of it. Telling people you just met that you had compliance nanites installed wasn't the best way to make a first impression. I ended up asking, "You

like it?"

She nodded, "Yeah, it's really interesting. I mean, I'm just a junior researcher; they really don't have me doing anything intense, but it gets your foot in the door at the company." She turned to me, "How about yourself?"

I smiled, "Arcology Machinery specialist."

She laughed a bit, "What?"

I laughed a bit back, "It's a fancy name for repairman. It's at the arco I live at."

She smiled. "How is it?"

I scratched the back of my head, "Exactly how you imagine working maintenance in run-down building stuffed with tens of thousands of people would be. Machinery is always breaking down left and right, but at least you don't have to commute for work, and every now and then, some of the residents will tip."

I pulled out my pack of cigarettes and offered Andrea one. She waved it off, and I put the pack away. She then asked, "How are your co-workers?"

"They're ok. Most of them live in other arcos, but a couple live in mine. I'll hit up the bars with them every now and then, nothing too special. Yours?"

She laughed, "Most are pretty boring to be honest. Always wrapped up in work, and a lot of the researchers are pretty self-important. There are a few that are cool though. Hopefully they'll get promoted into the same divisions I want to go into."

It wasn't a bad night even with my hallucinations going strong. The different city lights gave the scene a colorful mood. Despite the haze that was probably permanently in Chicago's atmosphere, the moon still managed to show itself in a section that wasn't obscured by the upper city layers above. One half of the moon lit by sunlight, with the other lit with the lights of its colonies.

We walked for quite a while. The conversation drifted onto us talking about ourselves and other details about our lives when we got back to my arco.

At the front entrance, I wished her good night, and gave her a quick hug. As I walked away, she quickly said, "Look, I know this is...kinda sudden and all, but," she scribbled something down on a piece of paper, "hit me up if you want to do something. I'm off tomorrow." I took the paper, and she smiled and walked away. My hallucinations, which were buzzing pretty strongly during the walk back, managed to subside as I headed up to my room.

Home sweet home, nothing but a single bed, a tiny kitchenette, and an even tinier bathroom. Beats the streets though. I grabbed myself a quick bite to eat from the kitchenette, took a quick shower, and crawled into bed.

After work the next day, I decided to call up Andrea and see if she wanted to do anything. She did, and she suggested that she meet her at a local science museum in the upper city. I wasn't much of a science guy, or a book guy for that matter, but sure, why not? Even though the water ration in my room was already pretty low for the day, I managed to grab a decent shower, and make myself look somewhat presentable, not wanting Andrea to think I was the usual arcology-trash.

After about a ten minute ride up high to the upper city, I saw her waiting at the outside of the museum, her phone in her hand. "Shane! I was just about to call you. I'm sorry, the museum, they have some little, I don't know, issue going on, and they closed early for the day."

Over her shoulder, I noticed that security guards were ushering people out of the museum pretty quickly. Right then and there, a hallucination hit me again. Pretty strong one too. My ears and head began to hurt from the noise and lights, and I cringed in pain.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing to worry about."

Andrea frowned, "Shane. I know it's not just your leg acting up."

I pursed my lips and looked around for a convenient excuse to change the subject, or some other excuse for my pain, but the little voice of reason (not the hallucination voice for the record) told me that she wouldn't buy whatever response I gave besides the truth. I sighed, flagged down a taxi, and led her towards it.

"I'll explain in here."

She nodded, and we slid into the taxi as the doors opened up. We sat down, and the taxi's auto-driver asked for a destination. I named the first place I could think of that was a bit of a distance away, so we would have awhile to talk.

"Well," I began, "I really don't know how to explain this, but...well, about eight months ago, I got in a fight with some assholes at a subway. They started it all, but the cops ended picking me up. Courts ruled that I had to have compliance nanites installed in me, to track me, and if I acted up again, to screw with my nerves. Anyways, ever since they put them in, I've been getting these weird...hallucinations or something. I can hear voices and see lights. The doctors all think it's schizo or something, and they keep giving me pills that only make me sick." I shook my head. "They keep telling me otherwise, and they think I'm just some dumb arcology-trash that doesn't know any better, but I know for a fact that it isn't my head going off, it's those nanites! I mean..." I stammered, "Is that even possible? Like can compliance nanites cause this?"

I was pleasantly surprised to see that Andrea's look on her face wasn't that of disgust or apprehension, but of understanding. "It's rare, and the companies still deny it, but it is possible for

some people to get...not hallucinations exactly, but have their brains be able to read the signals from the nanites so to speak.” She pulled out her phone and began to mess around with it. “Normally, the signals that the nanites send and transmit aren’t supposed to be picked up by your brain at all, but for some people, it’s possible, although very, very rare.”

I sat back in my seat. “That explains another thing I was wondering. You know, when you hear about people having hallucinations, they usually see and hear stuff that don’t make sense, like, I don’t know, the Prime Minister juggling...toothbrushes on a...purple...glass...spaceship or something stupid. While I could never explain what the lights were, the voices that I heard? It almost sounded like I was...listening into a conversation or something.”

Andrea put away her phone. “You’re probably tuning into a frequency that the nanites happened to pick up. Compliance nanites are pretty much little radios; they need to be, otherwise, they wouldn’t do what they intended to do.”

“Yeah, but I’ve been hearing the same voices over and over again.”

She shrugged. “You’re picking up the same frequency over and over again. I wouldn’t lose too much sleep over it.” She placed a hand on my shoulder. “Come on, let’s not worry too much about this. I know it’s messed up, but they won’t hurt you too badly. Where is this taxi taking us anyways?”

I told her the location.

“Perfect. There is a little theatre up there. My cousin performs there, maybe there is a show going on!”

“Well ok then.” I responded with a smile.

The taxi drove on. It is amazing how much nicer the upper city levels were compared to the lower levels where I was from. Here, the sky could be clearly seen, although it was still very smoggy; if you wanted a clear view of the sky, you had to go to the highest levels, which were usually protected to keep anyone from just walking in. Cops weren’t dressed in riot gear as their street uniforms, and you only saw an occasional beggar, rather than droves of them everywhere.

“So where in town do you live?” I asked Andrea.

“North Side. Mid-city level. Bellstand Apartments. Before that, I lived in the far Eastern side in Indiana. The Hatcher Arcology. Not exactly the most pleasant place in the world. Two-hundred and fifty thousand of the Union’s finest in one building.” She turned to me, “And those are the people that had the cash for a room. You had a couple thousand more living in the hallways, common areas...”

Andrea slowly shook her head, “I remember not being able to go anywhere myself when I

lived there. Too dangerous. It was illegal for my dad and I to have one, but we both would carry a gun while we were in there. Only had to use it once, didn't have to fire it, but had to flash it at some thug that pulled a knife on me."

"Damn, that must have been scary."

Andrea grimaced. "Oh it was. Good thing there was some distance between me and him. Gun would only ever have two shots in it; black market ammo was pretty expensive."

"Your dad ever have any trouble?"

Andrea nodded. "More than me. My uncle, his brother, was a security guard, so you had all sorts of people trying to attack him, and sometimes me simply out of revenge for something my uncle did."

She looked increasingly uncomfortable, so I changed the subject to something a bit more cheery. "What kind of shows does your cousin do?"

"She's big into the romantic-comedy type, but she's done a few tragedies. She's on my mother's side of the family. My mom and her sister were identical twins, and she looks a lot like me."

"How long has she been acting for?"

"Ever since she was a kid, about nine, I think."

"That's something there."

"It really was. When I saw her, she would always love to put on 'shows' for my dad and I."

"What did your mother think?"

Andrea's face turned expressionless. "She died when I was only one."

"I'm really sorry." I said.

Andrea blinked a few times, "It's fine. I never really knew her that well. Personally at least, just what Dad told me."

I rested my hand on hers, and we drove silently the rest of the way to the theatre. When we arrived, it was unusually quiet, but I guessed it was just due to the time of the day. As we step out of the taxi, my hallucinations started to pick up, but I couldn't make out what the voices were saying this time.

Andrea led the way inside. "My cousin usually hangs out here most of the day, even when there isn't a show on. If we wait around inside, she'll be able to get a show for free."

The main theatre was quiet, occupied by only Andrea and myself. I walked up towards the stage, imagining the all the performances that had gone on here.

"So where is your cousin at?" I asked turning towards Andrea.

I found myself staring at her pointing the same device that the guard back at the hospital used on me.

"I'm sorry Shane."

She pressed the button, my body filled with pain, and I fell to the ground. I could hear the voices very clearly now.

We got him! We got him! Nice work!

Several men dressed in combat gear, their faces covered up by one-way visors ran up to me. The last thing I remember was one pulling out a sweet-smelling rag and sticking it to my face.

--

I woke up on some sort of operating table. I was wearing a hospital gown of sorts, and I was surrounded by doctors and nurses. Andrea was there too, dressed up in a lab coat, reading a monitor and scribbling down notes.

"What..." I tried to say, "where...what's happening? Andrea? What are you doing?" Andrea walked over to me. "I suppose it is only fair to tell you that isn't my real name, but you may continue to call me that."

"What...why?"

"Andrea" looked at me with an expressionless look, "The fact that the nanites caused you to hear signals is an indicator that your DNA has a mutation that we need for our project. We've been watching you closely for the past few months or so, when you filed a record regarding the hallucinations you were claiming to have. We set up the perfect opportunity for you to fall into our possession. Remember the bar fight? Well, anyways, we've already done most of what we need, we just need to keep you here for a few more days to make sure that your memories will be completely wiped. Oh and don't worry, your employer knows that you are...occupied at the moment."

One of doctors grabbed the operating table and pushed it out of the room. I wasn't strapped down, and my strength was quickly returning. I was in some sort of lab, and the only noise I could hear was the sound of the wheels creaking, and hushed voices behind closed doors. As the doctors made a turn, I looked up and looked around. It was just me and this chump. I pretended to look like I was adjusting myself to get comfortable, and I then kicked the doctor square in the chest with both of my feet. He pushed my cart away in shock. Perfect. It was helping me get away, but if I crashed, they would have no trouble scooping me back up. Thinking quickly, I got myself off the speeding cart, and began to run as fast as I could, my legs stiff, but thankfully working.

“He’s getting away!” screamed the doctor.

I zig-zagged from hallway to hallway, dodging lab staff left and right who were too shocked to try to stop me. I pushed my way through a door and into a large lobby-like area. I was headed in a now dead sprint to what appeared to be the front entrance, or elevator when I heard a woman’s voice yell out,

“That’s far enough Shane!”

Andrea was standing on the other side of the lobby. She had the same device that guard had back at the doctor’s office the other day, and was raising it at me, when I heard a gunshot.

The bullet hit Andrea square in the right shoulder, causing her to drop the device. My savior was standing in the corner of the room, motioning for me to come his way. I followed him, and both of us sprinted through a door, and through a set of emergency stairs. The man threw some sort of device down the staircase past me, and I heard a loud bang and a hiss of smoke.

“What’s going on?”

“Shut up and keep moving!” he yelled back.

We went up a few flights of stairs, and through another door into another hallway. This one had windows, and outside a large one, I could see that it was daylight outside, and wherever we were, it was high up above the city. The man threw some sort of device far, far ahead of us at the window. It exploded, blowing out the glass. He ran up to the window and stopped. I ran up to him, and before I could say anything, a helicopter flew up right next to the window. The side of the helicopter extended a plank of sorts. The man grabbed me, and dragged me across it. We fell into the chopper, the plank retracted back into it, and we flew away.

I tried to catch my breath. “What...what the hell is going on?”

“Just saved your ass, that’s what’s going on,” the man said.

I collapsed against a seat on the chopper. “What did they want exactly? They said something about my DNA being what they needed or something like that?”

“They wanted you to help further their project. Trying to make the next generation of man. This hypothetical species would have many of the primal instincts that the current human species have removed, a larger brain function, and a high capacity for logical thinking and predictive thinking. Only certain DNA types can be used in the process, and these types account for less than 1% of the population.”

“So I’m special then?”

“Yep.”

“So they wanted to...evolve me?”

“Not you exactly, your offspring. They modified your reproduction organs to produce sperm cells with modified DNA. Combine that with an ova with the modified DNA, and the baby will be this new human that they are trying to create.”

“I see.”

I let out a deep breath. My heart was still racing. “Why did you save me for?”

“We need you in our...possession.”

“Why do you need me exactly?”

The man reached into his pocket and pulled out a device and pointed at me, clicking it. My body filled with pain, and my vision began to blur.

“The same reason they wanted you. But for our project.”

The last thing I remember was falling over in my seat before blacking out.

Infinitum

Michael Sosnowski

The Lord put a song in my heart
and it's playin' to the tune of your smile.
With a composition so grand
it could move the earth from the sun.
The melody of the ages
and a harmony that has yet to be heard.
And your kiss
is the only instrument
that can bring it to life.

Twilight Memories

Anna Rohaly

Her mind fades,
like shadows in twilight.
She sits silent, lost to her past.
Memories dance as dust motes before her,
leading her backwards through life.
Content in the past, remembering,
she brushes her granddaughter's hair.
She brushes my hair,
until ten other babies' faces
crowd into her flustered mind,
then the memory flits away.
Now she sees the faces
of loved ones long dead.
Her mother, her sister,
her two babies, stillborn.
The sorrowful faces melt away.
She moves to happier times
where she holds her five little children,
smiling, laughing, singing, cuddling.
They were the secret to her joy.
Further back her memories fly,
until she sails on bright blue waters
away from her Germany.
In a land breathing freedom
a handsome soldier waits for her.
On deck, she thinks of his letters,
re-reading his words in her heart.
The past beckons further back.
She is a small child again,

whispering her childish secrets.

She cuts her cousin's hair,

sees the locks fall like gold,

hears her mother's scolding.

Coming back to the present, Oma opens her eyes,

Our stories fly past her, she doesn't understand.

"Who are these people?" she asks.

She turns to me, "Who are you?

Why are you in my house?"

Her mind fades into twilight,

her days are passed, she stands facing the night.

She slips again into shadow,

dreaming again of the past.

Platinum

Nicole Thomsen

Big. Blond. Bold.

I was in the seventh grade and my hips were huge. I hated looking in the mirror because they were the first thing I saw; I wasn't fat, just wide and insanely curvy. I didn't want my hips to be the first thing someone was going to notice and judge me by. My hair at that time had never been dyed; it was almost three feet long and had a little wave in it, but it was flat. I still had natural-snow-white-blond-with-a-hint-of-butterscotch and it was beautiful, but it wasn't bold enough to distract people from my gigantic hips. I decided I would go blonder. Add a few highlights. That ought to steal some of the attention. And it did for about a week; then everyone got used to it again. I tried crimping, curling, straightening, I even tried kinking it, but it still wasn't good enough for my colossal hips.

The eighth grade dance. My dress was a dark mahogany. My hair was awesome. Three hours before the dance I curled the crud out of it. It looked terrible. No matter what I did, it was still flat. I started to cry when my mom came to the rescue. I carefully watched her as she backcombed through the roots of my hair. She repeated the same steps for almost an hour. A pack of bobby pins and a can of hairspray later, my hair was gorgeous; and no one was going to notice my hips.

From that day on, every time I went out, my hair was teased. I eventually lost the weight but I still kept the huge hair. It got me noticed; now I'm known for it. It's become my signature. No one can get a tease to stay in like mine. My secret is in the product and the comb. Between the gel and the hairspray it gets expensive. I go through a can of hairspray a week but it's worth it. It isn't cheap to have huge hair. Not to mention, I'm platinum. It's a sub category of blond. There is a difference. Blond is innocent, it's playful, it's golden. Platinum is dangerous, it's bold, it's intimidating and it takes a lot to pull off. It's not cheap gold, it's white gold. Your skin can be as dark as you want when you're blond. But when you're platinum, if you go a tint past bronze you look like a glowing pumpkin; if your clothes are too bright you turn into disco Barbie. If your make up is too dark you'll seem "emo" and people will think you live in a shrink's office. A girl with platinum hair has to have a little mean in her because it is physically painful to get this blond. It takes three layers of bleach to get these glossy white highlights. I leave the bleach in so long my scalp begins to bleed. If

it's brassy, then I have to go buy an ash brown mix and put in a light layer of lowlights. If they're too thick or I use too many, my hair will turn out grey and I'll have to re-bleach. My eight-ounce purple tinting shampoo cost sixteen dollars; it dries the crap out of my hair and I run out of it in two weeks. I burn my scalp once a week with hot oil treatments to keep my hair from falling out. The process is agonizing but it's who I am and it's what I love. My hair is my life. Big. Blond. Bold.

Turkey Muscle

Katie Guernsey

“What do you want from Arby’s?”

Think, think, think.

A Market Fresh turkey?

Maybe a roast beef?

“Market Fresh turkey.”

The smell of pine wafted in

Through the open window.

Our Christmas tree sat

In the back of the pickup,

The three of us

Stuffed into the front seat.

The exciting, hopeful feeling filled the air

That always comes with Christmastime.

I cracked my ankle,

Watching the tendons flex.

“What’s meat made of?

Mom stopped ordering to look at me.

“What part of the animal is the meat?

Is it the muscle that we eat?”

Mom didn’t respond, sensing a problem.

I flexed my hand

Watching the tendons and ligaments,

Felt the muscle in my thumb.

All at once I felt a wave of nausea.

My head started spinning,
My mouth went dry.

“Forget the turkey.
Give me a salad.”

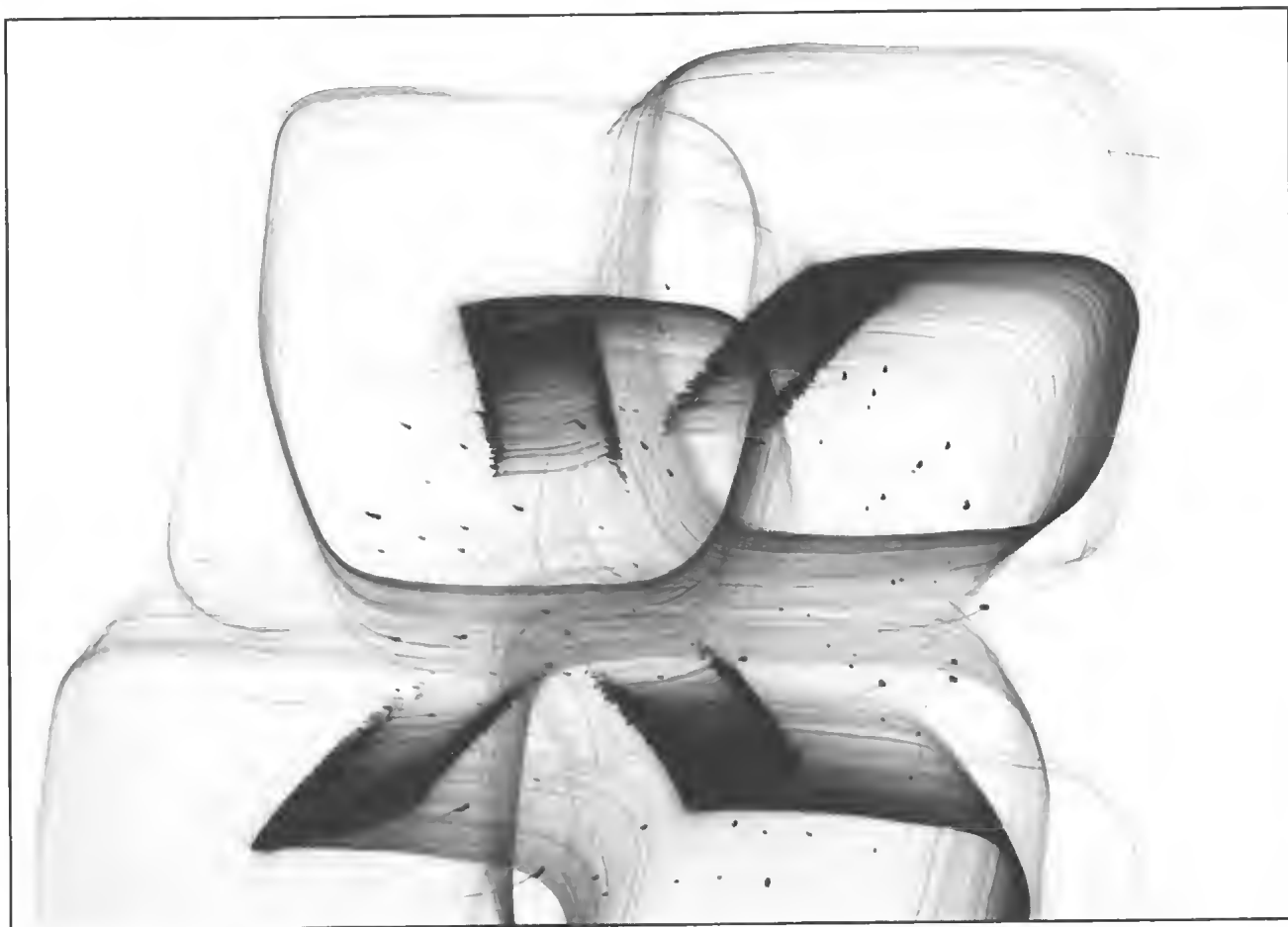
Let Me Write You a Letter

Michael Sosnowski

Let me write you a letter,
explaining all I ever was
and want to be.
Take the time to jot down memories.
read the repetitions
of joy
and misery.

Let me write you a letter,
sending it to the trash;
words never sent.
Scarred heart beating
on that manuscript.
Hurting
all the while.

Let me write you a letter,
giving you a bit of my mind.
I'll tell what I think and feel.
Things you need to hear.
Take the time to read it.
Making peace
with every line.
Let me say I'm sorry.



Sky
Juan Carlos Rodriguez



Moon Vase
Shane Pack



Willow Woman
Nicole Thomsen



Ice Fissure
Professor Corey Crum



Skulls
Juan Carlos Rodriguez



Goblets
Shane Pack



Nature's Creation
Amanda Duncan



Carcass Tidal Wave
Professor Corey Crum



Turning
Shayna Polomchak



Granadaian Ritual
Juan Carlos Rodriguez

The Dress
Nicole Thomsen

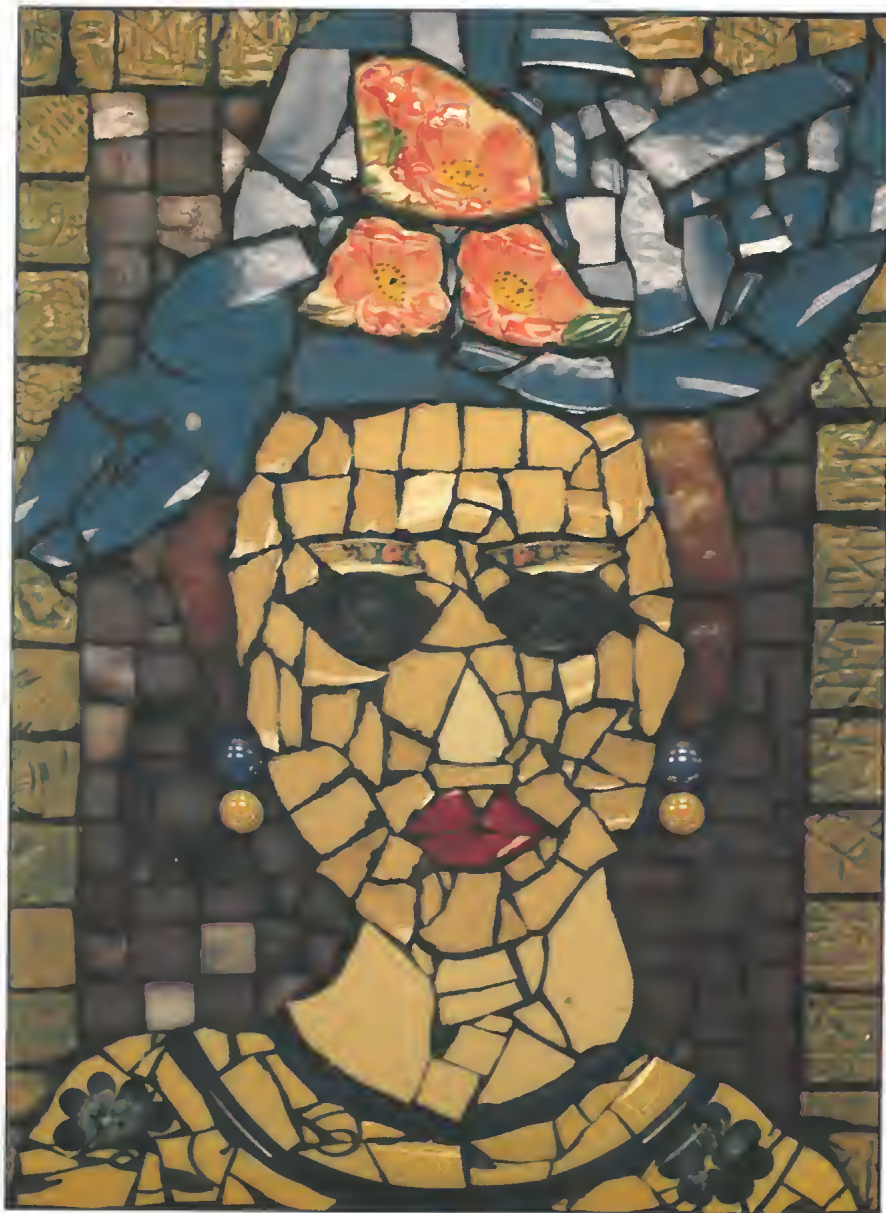




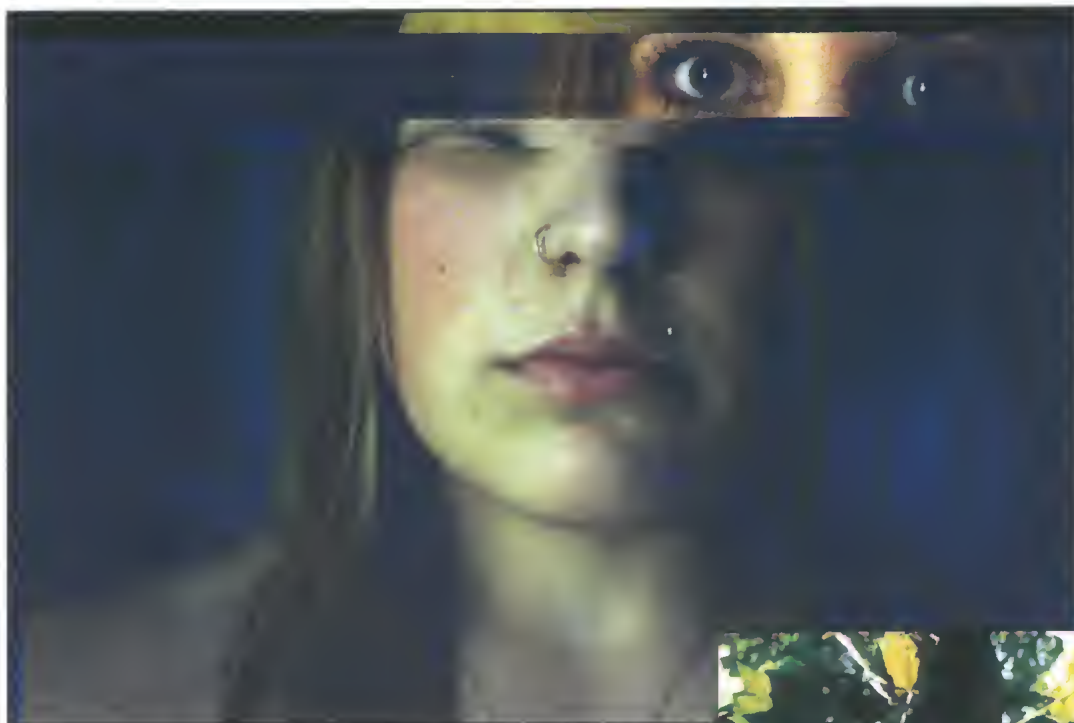
The Practice
Steve Andresen



Bullwinkle Goes To Core
Jessica Krull



My Lady
Regina Warfel



Disjointed
Kelsey Reynolds



Serene
Jordan Guimond

Silent Hum

Amanda Rosseau

On a crisp fall night
the moon is high and gleaming
she walks just out of sight
from her home and dreaming
of light she fights

as his hand grasps
an open gape
around her mouth it clasps
her heels scrape

along the ground
they make
the only sound
to break
(The silent hum of rape)

away. She rakes her mind
and takes
one shot to break the bind
she makes

a guilty man chaste
sterilized by fate
and the sharp embrace
of his last mate.

Were We Wrong?

Nicole Thomsen

They came into my room,
she's bawling.

One of the toughest girls I
know.

The words come out of her
mouth,

yet I don't comprehend them.

How could this be happening?

MTV makes shows on it.

I've seen them.

I still can't believe it.

I grab all my cash,
we get in the car.

I was always pro-choice,
but it didn't feel right.

This girl was my friend.

I knew her.

She couldn't keep it,
not without ruining her life.

I agreed with her.

I paid for it.

A couple hundred dollars later,
it's all taken care of.

I Don't Want To Be In Love

Randee Portteus

Daisy supposed her opposition to love had grown stronger somewhere in between her parents' divorce, her attempted and failed relationships, and picking up the pieces of her friends when they were crushed by some boy or another. By her senior year, she was done. Love, happiness, whatever you wanted to call it, she wasn't having any of it. Come September, she'd be gone, off to college, where she could be anonymous and no one would know or care about her or her past.

But she had to survive Valentine's Day first.

Dear Lord, how she hated that holiday. Yes, she knew, she was original: a world-weary, single, teenage girl who hated Valentine's Day. Maybe she would watch horror movies and wear black to protest. In reality, her plans for the upcoming February 14th included sweatpants, chocolate, and napping. The night before the dreaded holiday, Daisy was in bed reading when the phone rang.

"Hey, girlie." The voice on the other end chirped.

"Hey, Coco, what's up?" Daisy replied. Courtney was Daisy's best friend. They'd met as freshmen, and Daisy had immediately bonded with the happy-go-lucky, blonde-and-blue-eyed girl. Daisy herself had been going through a rough time – her parents' divorce. The circles under her gray eyes were nearly as dark as her hair then, and Coco's incessant optimism and hope made Daisy smile. Because of her lightheartedness, many people wrote Coco off as ditzy. Daisy knew better, though. Coco was not only a straight-A student, she had a way with people. She could read them with a single glance and a short conversation, a skill that Daisy had always lacked. She preferred to jump to conclusions and judge people harshly. Coco made her see things in a different light.

"Well, see, I have this favor to ask you."

"Of course, anything for you."

"Even going out on Valentine's Day?"

Daisy opened the fridge and grabbed the carton of orange juice. "What?"

"Daisy, listen. I know how you feel about Valentine's Day, but please, I'm begging."

"What would we be doing?"

"Ok, see there's this guy, and I really, really like him, and we've been talking for a while, and he and all his friends are going bowling for Valentine's Day, and he invited me and said I could bring a friend if I wanted, and – this is the most exciting part – he said, just don't bring any guys with you! And he said it all flirty and –"

“Coco, stop. First of all, I hate Valentine’s Day. Second of all, I haven’t left the house on Valentine’s day for the last three years, and I wasn’t planning on breaking my record now. Third, I have no idea who this guy is. And finally, I hate bowling almost as much as this holiday. So the answer is no.”

“Daisy, please. Please, I’m begging.”

“No.”

“All right, I really didn’t want to do this, but you’ve forced me. I’m invoking the best friend card.”

“No!” The best friend card was something the two girls had invented early in their friendship. When one of them “pulled” or “invoked” the best friend card, the other had to either: a) do what was being asked, or b) tell what was being asked. There was one rule: it could only be used three times a year. It had gotten Daisy to prom last year, and had often gotten Coco to stop talking to boys who were no good for her. The best friend card was powerful, and it was never ignored.

It was Daisy’s turn to beg, “C’mon, Coco, you know I hate Valentine’s Day.”

“Too bad. I’ll pick you up tomorrow at three.” With that, Coco hung up. Daisy stared at the phone in disbelief. Muttering curses under her breath, she put down her book and reached for her iPod, turning her music on as loud as it would go and burying her face in her pillow.

Daisy woke up to eighties bubblegum pop music blasting through the house the next morning at eleven. After her attempts to smother the noise with a pillow failed, she growled and hurled it at the wall. She slumped down to the kitchen and was greeted by her all-too-cheerful mother. “Morning, baby!” Her mother said. “Happy Valentine’s Day!” Daisy blinked at her mother. She was already dressed in too-tight faded jeans, and a flimsy pink shirt.

“Yeah, sure.” Daisy muttered.

“Aww, c’mon, I’m sure you’ll find a Valentine!” Daisy didn’t even bother to respond. Her mother was clueless. She had been since the divorce. She thought her dad must have gotten the brains as a part of the settlement. “Listen, I’m going to meet my girlfriends in a few minutes for lunch, and I have a date tonight! But I’ll be back in the afternoon, so I’ll see you then, ok?!” Daisy was annoyed. Most days she could put up with her mother’s constant, mostly fake pep, but today it grated on her nerves. Why the hell did every sentence have to end with an exclamation point? “I won’t be here.” She said shortly.

“Oh, you have plans?! How exciting! With a boy?!”

“No, with Coco.”

“Oh, fun! Girls night! Well, have a good time! I’ll see you tonight! Or maybe not, if all goes well!” she said with a wink.

Daisy grimaced at her mother’s disgusting implication. Very nice, mother, very nice. Maybe Daisy would find someplace to stay tonight so she wouldn’t have to know if her mother followed through on this statement. As soon as her mother was out the door, Daisy switched the music. Punk-rock blasted through the house, immediately easing Daisy’s nerves.

She grabbed the carton of orange juice and headed for the couch. Her cat, Banana, sat in his usual spot, and Daisy grabbed a seat next to him. She switched on the TV, but was immediately dissatisfied. It was all Meg Ryan/Tom Hanks romantic comedies or Valentine’s Day Specials. She wanted to vomit. Finally, on some local channel, she found a made for TV sci-fi movie. She smiled with satisfaction at the terrible graphics and even worse plot.

Once her movie was over, Daisy sighed. She knew she had to get ready. In her room, she stared unhappily into her closet. Banana wound around her ankles, and she asked him what he thought she should wear. But the cat had no advice. She grabbed her comfy, ripped up jeans. She figured her shirt better look semi-nice or Coco would throw a hissy fit. She settled on a white, v-neck t-shirt. It wasn’t exactly nice, but it was in decent shape, and it didn’t look terrible on her. It also wasn’t black. Daisy laughed.

As for her hair ... Daisy just grabbed two chunks of it and twisted, then pinned them back. For makeup, she decided something glittery would keep Coco from being too displeased with her appearance. Just as she finished, Coco pulled up. The ride to the bowling alley was spent mostly on analyzing the behavior of Coco’s boy, which Daisy didn’t mind. He seemed nice from what Daisy knew about him from school and from what information she got from Coco. Daisy would give him a fair chance, just like all of Coco’s boys got.

Another reason people tended to stick Coco in the “dumb blonde” category was her tendency to go through boys. And it was true. Daisy’s best friend could, and often did, date and break up with three or four boys in a couple of months. Again, Daisy knew better than most. Coco liked boys, she liked dating. But she knew all too well that a serious relationship or even one that wasn’t serious could lead to more than she could handle. Her own mother had gotten pregnant at fifteen. And though Coco went through boy after boy, she somehow managed to stay on good terms with nearly all of them. But she was always excited when a new one came along, and this one was no different. Coco was fit to burst by the time they pulled up to the bowling alley.

It was unimpressive. In fact, it was absolutely dinky on the outside. The inside wasn’t much better, Daisy thought as she and Coco made their way inside and over to the group of teenagers

waiting for them at a table in front of the dingy lanes. Daisy was introduced to Coco's boy, who seemed decent in person. Daisy decided she would be nice to him. There were two other boys and two girls who also seemed nice. Maybe being there would be fine after all, she thought on her way to get shoes.

As she handed over her money, a voice behind her breathed "Fancy meeting you here, babe." Her first reaction was fear. Who the hell sneaks up on someone like that?

Her second reaction, as her nerves calmed, was ...

What was it? She knew who it was. Her first real boyfriend, James, they had met when they were fifteen at some awful formal dance at school where they were both left by their friends, who all coupled off. They traded awkward, uncomfortable jokes for a few minutes when he said, "Let's get out of here." And maybe it was the stupidest thing she'd ever done, but Daisy agreed because she was feeling angry and lonely and reckless.

That first night, they spent seven hours together, dangling their feet in the school's pool. She got hell from her parents when she got home, three hours past her midnight curfew, but she didn't care. She was too angry with her parents and too thrilled with her new friendship, which was more from the beginning. She went from friendship, to crushing hard, to seriously liking, to actually dating James in a matter of months, the same months that her parents' fighting began to get unbearable and divorce became inevitable. James carried her through it all, her best friend and total confidant.

At the end of freshman year, James's mother got the opportunity to move to Ireland for work. A week after school let out, James was gone. Daisy was crushed. Not only was her dad going to leave, but James was gone already. They still talked often, instant messaging and the occasional phone call, but there was no doubt they were broken up. James wouldn't be back until the middle of junior year. Trying to date while he was an ocean away was ridiculous. But James made an impact on Daisy's life that was undeniable and, some days, unbearable, and the distance between them did nothing to lessen it.

He'd come back, as promised, the second semester of their junior year. For some reason, though, all of the talking they'd done while James was gone didn't seem to matter. The two drifted apart, and Daisy found this easier anyway. If James didn't seek out her friendship, her company, then he did not want her. Never mind their few dates. Never mind that she had stayed up night after night, talking to him on the computer while her parents' biting words drifted down the hall and tugged at Daisy's heart. Never mind that she – just never mind.

Around the time James came back, Daisy decided that she needed no one. Except ... now here he was, standing behind her. She turned around, steeling herself. "Hi." She said with a smile.

"I thought you were never going out on Valentine's Day again?" He asked, handing the man behind the counter money for shoes. Daisy felt a twinge. James knew far more about her than she'd like. She'd told him so much. Funny thing was, he had no idea how much more he knew than most people.

"I wasn't planning on it. But Coco pulled the best friend card on me. What are you doing here?"

"I'm friends with Jake." He glanced over as Coco laughed and squeezed her boy's arm. "Is he Coco's latest conquest?"

"I guess. They've been talking or whatever. She seems happy, he seems nice." Daisy shrugged.

"What about you?" He asked, grabbing the shoes and shooting the guy a quick thank you.

"I'm not dating anyone." She laughed. "Relationships haven't really worked out for me."

"Believe me, I know. You were the only one that was ever good for me. But I was actually asking if you were happy."

"Oh. Well, yeah. I mean ... yeah, I guess." She stumbled over her words, distracted by what he said about her.

"How's your mom?" His gaze on her was intense.

"Fine, she's out tonight with some asshole or another."

"And your dad?"

"He pays what attention to me he is legally required to." Daisy's voice didn't even waver. She was pleased.

"Oh, Day ..." James started, using his nickname for her. Inwardly, she cringed but on the outside she laughed, cutting him off. "What? I'm honestly fine, Jamie." And she raised her eyes to his, finally taking him in. She was immediately aware that this was a mistake. His eyes were the same blue-green behind his glasses. His hair, a shade lighter than hers, was pushed up in the front in the same dorky way. But he was taller and his face had lost some of its boyishness. And Daisy was faced with the truth that she tried and tried to ignore: she was completely in love with this boy, and she had been for the last four years.

Instead of dealing with this, instead of facing him or her feelings head on, Daisy just laughed again. It was strained, but it was enough to make her break their gaze and return to the group. James followed, joining the group as well. The night went on, and the two spoke occasionally, nothing special. Daisy even had fun. And once their games were done, James pulled on his coat and said, "I think I'll head out, guys. Happy Valentine's Day, though."

Daisy lasted all of thirty seconds before she turned to Coco and said "I'll be right back." She was out the door in a second, and caught up to James, out of breath, as he unlocked his car. He stared at her for a second, then said, "Did you really just run after me?"

"Yes." Daisy said.

"Do you want something?" He asked.

"Yes."

"Well ...?"

"How was Ireland?"

"Great." He laughed. "I loved it. But there's something else, Day, isn't there?"

"No." He just looked at her. "Just ... I missed you."

"Yeah, I missed you, too." He grinned. "Let's get out of here."

She laughed, remembering the first time he said that to her, that night at the dance.

"That sounds fantastic."

They drove around, making up for lost time. They ended up at a park, which was of course closed at this time of night. They snuck in anyway. Daisy was headed for the swings when she saw the pool. "James!" She whispered.

"What?" He replied, equally as quiet.

"There's a pool!"

"Yes. There is a pool."

"Do you want to ...?" Daisy let her question trail off, knowing he would understand.

He smiled and headed towards the pool. They were over the fence in a minute and sat on the edge, their feet in the water, just like the first night they met. They talked until three in the morning. Later, when he dropped her off at home, her stomach sank. "Oh, God." She muttered.

"What's wrong?" James asked.

Daisy gestured to the house. There was light shining through her mother's bedroom windows, and a car Daisy had never seen parked in the driveway. Her mother had brought someone home again. "Come stay at my house." James said, immediately picking up on Daisy's bad mood and the reason for it.

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Won't your mom kill you?"

"We'll be sneaky."

Daisy laughed. Sneaking her into James's one-story ranch proved rather easy. James talked

to his mom for a few minutes before he came back to his room. She waited at the window while he opened it and popped the screen out. Daisy accepted the offer of shorts and a t-shirt, but refused to sleep in the bed. A whispered argument followed, which Daisy won. She ended up sleeping on the floor, but didn't really mind. Anything was really better than listening to her mother ...

Over the next few months, James and Daisy became almost inseparable. They joked and laughed at school, and found time to spend together afterwards. Daisy camped out on James's floor nearly every Saturday. Her mother barely noticed her absences, and when she did, Daisy simply said "Coco and I are hanging out." Her mother was happy to swallow this, and Daisy was eager to get out of the house.

Daisy was happy, or something close to it.

Then came James's party. He was turning nineteen in late July, right before they left for college. His birthday party, he said, was going to be a typical "as-seen-in-romantic-comedies" teen party. She'd laughed and asked what he wanted for his birthday. Though he insisted on no presents, Daisy had dug up an old picture of the two of them from when they were younger. On the back James had scrawled:

Day! I thought you might want this. You're too damn cute. Love, Jamie

Daisy stuck the picture in her back pocket and headed over to the party. James greeted her at the door, red plastic cup in hand. He raised it towards her. "See? What'd I tell you?" he shouted over the pounding music, "Is this straight out of the movies or what?" Daisy laughed and nodded.

"I have something for you!" she shouted back, leaning in closer. He pulled her into the crowded foyer and said, "Well, I have something for you, too." And then he pressed his mouth to hers. Daisy's heart sped up as she pulled him closer, kissing him back. He broke away, grinning, and handed her his drink. "Here, try this. I'll be right back." And he disappeared into the crowd of people. Daisy just watched, too stunned and too stupidly happy to do anything else.

"Daisy." A much more somber voice came from Daisy's right. Coco was sitting in a room that was empty and dark. Daisy saw that the door had been barricaded by a heavy trunk. She took a gulp of her drink and made her way towards Coco. Once she had clambered over the trunk, she realized why the room was off-limits. A china cabinet with intricately painted china sat in one corner, while a wine rack sat in another. If the party had been brought into the room, none of this would have survived.

"Hey, Coco. What's up?" Daisy asked, sitting down next to her best friend.

"So you and James, huh?" Coco asked. But there was something wrong, something in her tone that was off.

“I don’t know, I guess. I mean, we’ve been hanging out and ...” Daisy shrugged.

“Wow, Day, do you hear yourself? Do you hear what you’re saying?”

Coco’s words stung. Instead of responding, Daisy stood up, ready to leave. “Daisy.” Coco’s voice came again, cool and calm. “You know I’m just looking out for you. I don’t want him to hurt you again.”

“How exactly did he hurt me, Coco, hmm?” Daisy turned and shot at her best friend.

“He left.” She held up a hand to cut off Daisy’s snarky remark, “And no, Ireland was not his fault. But then he kept talking to you. You depended on him, Daisy, I know you did. You confided in him. Every fight your parents had, every idiotic remark from your mom, every hurtful comment from your dad. You told him everything. And what else did you tell him, Daisy? What else did you do for him?”

Daisy felt heat rush to her face. Of course, Coco knew everything that had happened between James and Daisy. The pictures, what else they talked about late at night, things that had seemed natural to Daisy at the time, and that these continued even when James had a girlfriend. Until, apparently, he’d grown tired of her, and their interactions grew less and less frequent, and then stopped altogether.

“He didn’t even bother to talk to you when he got back, Daisy. And what did he do for you? In return for all those things you did for him?”

“He —” Daisy started, but Coco interrupted again. “Oh, I know he listened. You had someone to pour your heart out to, who offered the perfect amount of comfort without making you feel weak, agreed with everything you said, never contradicted you, and only made you feel good. Unless, of course, he wanted something, in which case he knew exactly how to get it from you. I saw you, Daisy, those days you didn’t want to get out of bed. Those days you weren’t even here with us in the real world. Those days he didn’t talk to you. I saw you, even if you couldn’t. And yeah you put up a good front every time you see him. But Daisy, I know you’re in love with him. And I know he doesn’t give two shits about you.”

“Really? How do you know that?” Daisy asked, sarcasm and anger clear in her voice.

“Did you know he was hooking up with Stacy Swain? And that she cut it off right before Valentine’s Day? Interesting, that he came back into your life right then, hmm? When he’s been carefully avoiding every social function you’d be at for the last year and a half.”

Coco’s words hit Daisy like a ton of bricks. She knew Coco was right. But she simply turned and walked away. She had to find James, had to talk to him, because surely — surely this wasn’t true. This was what Daisy thought until she stumbled into kitchen. Where she found James kissing a

redhead she didn't recognize. Just like he'd been kissing her a few minutes ago.

"James ..."

He turned. "Oh, Daisy." His voice was flat.

Daisy took a deep breath and reassembled her face. She fixed a smile there. Stood up straight. Gave James a wave and a cheerful "happy birthday!" But her heart ... it hurt. Every time she took a breath, it hurt, every time she thought ... what had she honestly expected from this summer, from James? Did she think that they could be together again? Did she think that would work?

She managed to get back to her car somehow, managed to drive through the dark and crowded streets and pull into her driveway. Gratefully she noted that there were no unfamiliar cars, no light shining in her mother's windows. She wiped the tears from her face, hoping it wasn't too red and puffy. Eh. Her mother probably wouldn't notice anyway. As she walked to her front door, her phone beeped. She glanced at the screen. Coco had texted her, asking if she was ok. Daisy replied, saying she was fine, thanks for the reality check, and they'd talk tomorrow. She just wanted her bed.

She opened her front door as quietly as she could, slipped off her shoes, and walked into the kitchen. "Hey, sunshine!" Her mother chirped from the living room. Dammit. Daisy had thought she'd be in bed. "Hey, Mom." She said.

"How was your night?" Her mother asked.

"It was ..." Daisy began, but lost her voice. She tried again, "It was ..." but the words wouldn't come. All she could see was how stupid she'd been. And then she started crying again.

Her mother was at her side in a second, arms around her, stroking her hair and murmuring that it would all be ok. "Baby, what happened?" She asked. Standing there in the half-lit kitchen, Daisy explained everything that had happened from the very beginning, from the first night she met James. Her mother listened without interrupting. When Daisy was done, her mother stood and went to the refrigerator. "I know you think I'm dumb, hon. I know that my cheerfulness annoys you, that you think I'm pretending and acting too young for my age." She said, digging through the freezer, "And, admittedly, sometimes my clothes are too tight and I am far from good at dealing with men, especially since your father ..." She found what she wanted, pulling out a container of chocolate ice cream, "But I didn't know how to talk to you after the divorce. You shut down on me and I thought ... well, I thought you didn't need me, so I did my best to let you alone." Daisy stared at her mother, dumbfounded. Her mother grabbed two spoons from a drawer and then reached out for Daisy's hand. Daisy took it and her mother led them back to the living room.

"Now, I can't fix the mistakes I've made, whether with your father, or other men, or the huge ones I've made with you. And I can't fix your broken heart either." Her mom sat on the couch. Daisy

followed. “But I can tell you how to make it better.” She handed Daisy a spoon. “Chocolate ice cream.” She pointed to the TV. “Alien marathon.” Then she looked at Daisy. “And tell Coco to come over with reinforcements.” She smiled. “Baby, we’ll get through this.”

Though her face was still wet with tears, her eyes no doubt swollen now, she managed to choke out a laugh. “I love you, Mom.”

Her mother looked at her with an expression that told Daisy her mother would be there as long as she needed and then some. “I love you too, Day.”



Chair-ity Mask
Professor Bonnie Zimmer

Punk Rock Serenade

Michael Sosnowski

Livin' on rock'n'roll
You leave me screamin'.
Wrist guards, converse, and attitude,
you squeeze my heart like a trigga.
I don't know how else to say it
So with three chords and the truth
I'll tell you this
It's a punk rock serenade
And I can't wait another day
To ask if you'll be mine

The Death and Rebirth of Love

Katie Guernsey

Once upon a time
she sent him to the store
to pick up Roma tomatoes
and instead he brought back
cherry tomatoes.

Once upon a time
she didn't say thanks
when his grandma gave
her pajama pants
for Christmas.

Once upon a time
she had a migraine
and wanted quiet
but he kept turning up
the volume on the radio.

Once upon a time
she forgot it was their
anniversary and she
went shopping with
her mom instead.

Once upon a time
they were in love
but then all the little things
got in the way.

So once upon a time
they went their separate ways
and even though they
were no longer in love,
everything was okay.

Because now she could go
to get her own Roma tomatoes
and he could turn up the
radio however high he wanted.

And then once upon a time
they both fell in love again
with other people
that they thought were better.

And their once upon a time
started all over again.

Completely Unseen

Anna Rohaly

I strove to be invisible
never seen by anyone.
Until one day I realized
that my goal was my reality.
I could say what I wanted
and do what I would without
facing disappointed frowns
or judgmental glances.
People never noticed
what I didn't want them to see
but they also didn't see
the very real me.
No one really saw the girl,
with tears behind her smile.
To them I had vanished
into nothing, completely
unseen.
Not worth a passing notice
and so my goal reversed.
I need to be seen.
Even if it means
I'll have disapproval,
judgment, or rejection to face.
I will also be hugged
on the days that I cry.
If I laugh or am sad
now I'll hear a reply.

Invisibility may have its perks
but I've learned that
melting into nothingness
really just hurts.

Pan

Nicole Thomsen

Didn't get dark until almost nine o'clock. My favorite shade of blue. Those deep teal summer nights let my imagination run wild. It was the summer of 2002, I had just turned ten, my curfew had just been moved up to nine thirty. If you knew my dad, you'd know why I always cut my plans short to make it home on time. My nights all ended just about the same: I'd come home and eagerly wait for my parents to go to bed. I'd wait for my mom to come and open the door to wish me goodnight. As she softly shut the door, my heart began to race. I'd listen for her to take the three steps to their bedroom and I'd jump up and swing open the curtains at the exact time she'd creak open her door. I'll never forget how loud those hideous moth pink curtains, stained peach with age were. If my timing was off, they'd hear me so I had to be quick. I'd slip the window open, sometimes I'd even spit on the hinges to keep it from squeaking. Then I'd crawl out and sit on the window sill and wait.

On July 2nd, I started this routine. I had been sleeping when I heard a tap on my window. Being the curious kid that I was, I threw off the covers and yanked it wide open. There was nothing there. I was confused. I thought I heard something and then it came again, only this time from my other window. I ran over to it and peeked out. Still nothing. I waited a couple minutes before I went back to bed. I looked out one last time before I shut it, but when I put my hand on the ledge there was a weird powder on it. It wasn't there when I first opened the window, I was almost sure of it. I looked up and there it was: his shadow. I didn't recognize him. Not at first, but I knew it was a boy and whoever it was he had a flashlight. I ran into my parent's room and woke them up, "There's someone on the roof!" By the time I finally rolled my dad out of bed, the boy was gone.

That was the first time I saw him. My mom banned me from keeping my window open. She didn't know whether or not to believe me but she put the rule in place just in case. And that's when I came up with the routine. I had no idea who he was or why he knocked on my window but I couldn't give up on the thought that he was going to come back. So I waited.

I figured it out. Hit me out of nowhere. I was in the library. I hated reading but I had to rent one book a week for school. Needless to say, I rented the ones with the cool covers. Then I saw it. The shadow. It was on the cover of a book, Hook. I was in shock. It was meant for a seventh grade reading level but I didn't care, I rented it anyway. I made my mom read it to me. His tale fit to a T.

I waited for him for three summers. He never did come back. But I still believe. I still wait. Someday he'll come back. Someday I'll have my adventure. Until then I'll keep my window open.

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At Journey's End

Michael Sosnowski

At journey's end
we say goodbye
and we speak
of futures we will never see.
Ones of hope, of dreams
where together we stand
joined in heart and in hand
for our paths
here do diverge.
But tarry not
for new life lies
upon untrodden roads.
And even though we must travel alone,
the adventure pleases.
So break with me
and set about your way,
and even though we part
I pray thee well.
I pray thee well.



Summer At Lake Banet
Shayna Polomchak

Best Friends

Kristina Hemmerling

Best friend. It's what a girl calls you when she doesn't want to admit she likes you. It's what nearly every girl I've ever liked has called me.

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I'm not a particularly nice guy. I don't say cute stuff. I don't give girls a reason to think I'm this super great best friend. To be honest, I'm kind of an asshole. I tell her when she looks like shit, or when her boyfriend clearly has no reason to be with her. I ignore her texts unless it's something worth answering. I'm late when we meet up for something. But these girls I've been friends with, these girls I've been legitimately interested in, they all have called me their best friend. They tell me their secrets. They tell me their thoughts. They tell me when they hate me, but they always come back.

I'm making it sound like I've been legitimately interested in a bunch of girls. Like I've had thousands of friend-girls that have liked me but refused to admit it. Really, it's only been three. I met Claire and Tiffany in eighth grade. Both were funny and smart, and both had super hot bodies, especially for eighth graders. Claire was the first girl I ever actually liked. Before her, I had "dated" a few girls I thought I had liked, but when Claire and I started hanging out I knew I had been wrong. Claire and Tiffany were nearly inseparable, and when Claire stopped hanging out with me during our freshman year because of her new boyfriend, Tiffany took her place.

I had always thought Tiffany was hotter than Claire, but she had never shown any interest. When she had her chance, though, she took it. Tiffany gave me a lot of firsts, including what I thought was my first love. At that point in my life I hadn't grasped the differences between love and lust. Tiffany made me feel things I had never felt before, but she always talked about not giving us a title. We weren't anything, but if we were it was just good friends. Tiffany didn't want a real relationship; we were too young for that. Every time she said that I wondered how we weren't too young for the things we were doing, but I didn't mention it. I liked those things too much to make her change her mind about them. Eventually she met some guy, too, and by the time we graduated I had become another best friend, had a decent amount of time full of black-out parties and one night stands, and had ignored the ache in my chest.

After Tiffany, I figured I was happy with my life style. If doing this stuff made me feel good

then why complicate it by getting involved with one person for more than one night? I was satisfied and worry free. I convinced myself I was living the good life, and that college was going to be a fun filled walk in a park full of hot chicks with very few emotions to go along with it.

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College. Freedom. Parties. The good life.

She's the first person I met. We are the only two people sitting at the undeclared table at the "Picnic with the Professors." We don't have a professor either. She sits across from me like the seat has her name on it.

"Thank Goodness I am not alone here. I've been talking to people and it seems like everyone already has their whole life planned. I'm here to figure out what I want to do, you know? It's not like I have all these crazy, lofty ideas about my future. How am I supposed to know what it's going to be like? They always say that God laughs at people who make plans, or whatever, so I try not to plan too far in advance. Gosh, this food looks so good. I am starving. I'm Natalie, by the way. What's your name?"

Some introduction. She spoke a mile a minute and made eye contact the whole time. I am stunned. Don't know how to respond. I feel like a fool, but comfortable at the same time. "Wow, well, I'm Davie. Technically David, but call me Davie or Dave."

"Technicalities, eh? Well, I'm technically Natalie Marie Elizabeth, but we don't want to get into that now do we? Natalie more than suffices. Davie's a nice name. Where are you from?"

She takes a huge bite of hamburger and tomato juice runs down her chin. Somehow it looks sexy on her. "About two hours east of here. Small town called Kupnike. You?"

She takes another oversized bite. "What a co-ink-y-dink," she purposefully separates each syllable. "I'm two hours west. Technically northwest I guess, but its mostly west. Also a small town. Called Jasperville."

Her half teal bangs keep falling into her eyes so she pushes them up every few seconds. The rest of her black hair falls over her shoulder and is tied back in a loose ribbon. It goes to the middle of her ribs. The teal from her bangs runs down part of the rest of her hair too. "Never heard of it."

"Not surprised. Most people haven't. It's not really worth hearing about. Everyone pretty much just goes fishing all the time." She wipes her chin and picks up her gray purse from the ground and pulls out a camera. "See. Everyone's, like, obsessed." She turns the black Cannon on and turns the screen towards me- a small lake filled with fishing boats. The next shot shows several men on a dock with poles in the water. A third shows a young girl and boy splashing in the water close to the

shore. "Everyone loves the water there. I think it's pretty and all, but so not about to go in it or get something out of it."

"You won't go in the water?"

"Heck no. So dirty. And dark. Who knows what's down there? Besides, I don't want those yucky fish to suck on my toes. Creeps me out. Does your town have a lake?" She finishes off her burger and starts on the noodle casserole on her plate.

I've hardly taken a bite since she sat. The way she's so open about everything has me too interested to eat. I focus all my attention on her. "Nope. We have a city pool, but it's pretty small. I love going on speedboats and stuff, but I don't get to unless we visit my cousins in Maine. I drove once. Didn't even hit anything either."

She laughs. "You seem proud. Boats freak me out. They could totally just flip over at any second. But that's cool that you like them."

A guy with light brown hair, square glasses, and a flannel shirt walks over. "Hey Nat. Who's your friend?" He sits down next to her and puts his arm around her shoulders, far too close to her chest area. He's trying to look nonchalant, but I can see how pissed he is that she sat across from me.

"This is Davie. He, too, has no clue what he wants in life. We were bonding over boats. We're probably going to be best friends." She laughs.

"You hate boats though."

"Exactly. Davie, this is Evan, my boyfriend. He is also from Jasperville."

I try to smile at the guy. His face makes me want to hit it and I don't even know him. "Nice to meet you, Evan." I force out his name. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth.

He just nods in response.

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"So, do you... party?" I didn't want to say drink, get drunk. It seemed too crude. She's better than those words.

She squints her eyes. Reading for hours made her lose her focusing abilities. When we study together I can't focus on anything but her. "My life is a party, boy. But no, I do not drink or whatever else you could be talking about. Don't see the point. If you can't do something while you're sober you shouldn't intoxicate yourself just to have the courage to do it. Not that you can't drink or whatever. I don't care, but yeah. I just don't see the point."

I know she's telling the truth, but her eyes say something else too. "Makes sense. I just think it's fun, drinking that is. I don't do anything else." I'm scared I sound like I'm defending myself.

"Have you ever been drunk?"

She's still squinting. "Yeah. It sucked." She smiles. "So yeah, never again. Do you party a lot?"

"Kind of. I went out last weekend."

She hadn't responded to any of my texts that night. I woke up in some blond girl's room the next morning.

"Maybe you saw Evan? He's rushing or whatever. Some frat. I guess they partied pretty hard that night."

Maybe those texts never went through. Probably for the best. "No, I don't think so."

Actually, I saw him outside a house. Some girl was rubbing his arm and laughing. He wasn't stopping her. Not my place to say anything though. Technically nothing was happening. She wouldn't believe me even if I told her. Why would she?

"Oh. Well, campus is pretty big." Her hands go up to her hair and begin to braid.

"Indeed. So, do you understand this assignment at all?"

She looks down at her book. "Well, yes." She looks at me. "Are you going out this weekend, too?"

Not if you want to do something instead. "I haven't decided yet. What are you doing?"

She looks at the tips of her hair. "No idea. Evan's all tied up with the frat I guess, and my roommate is going home this weekend."

Just ask me and I will stay in with you. I don't need to be drunk if I get to be with you. In your room, where there's a bed. Alone. "I see. Well, we could hang out if you want." I didn't want to initiate it, but I can tell she's scared. If Evan asks, it was all my fault.

She glances up at me then back down. "Only if you didn't want to go out."

I'd much rather be doing other things with you. "Nah, I heard most of the frats were doing initiation stuff anyway. No outsiders allowed."

She looks up and grins. "Cool. Movie night?"

--

We sit on the futon in her room. She turns on the TV and we watch some cheesy, girly movie about love. I can't focus. Her hair smells so good, and her leg is centimeters from mine. I could twitch and we'd be touching. Her shorts have pulled up over her thigh, and damn I cannot focus. She keeps twisting the ends of her long black hair between her fingers. She's partially watching the movie, but mostly listening. Her eyes move back and forth between her hair and the screen, and I

swear she occasionally glances my way.

It's so hot I'm sweating. I can see beads of sweat by her hairline and on her chest. I was trying not to look there, but I can't help it. I'm too attracted. There's no way I can keep this up.

I stretch my arms and put them behind the couch. What I want to do is put my arms around her, pull her towards me, kiss her like that douche Evan has never kissed her before, but I know she'd shrug off my arm, push me off, kick me out of her room. She's too good a person to accept something like that. She shifts in her seat and her shorts pull up even higher. It is so hot in this room I might die.

"Man it's hot."

She looks at me for real this time. Relieved I said something about the heat first. "Yeah, it kind of is. Want me to open the window or something?"

I nod. While she pulls open the blinds and unlocks the window I stare at her so hard. If only I could have her.

--

Three other students have become undeclared since this semester started. No more fifty minutes to have Natalie all by myself. Five of us share them now. "How to Figure Out Who You Want to Be." As if this helps. The five of us sit in a room and talk about how we don't know where we're going in life. Three guys and two girls. Two pretty hot girls, one girl I could be in love with. The other guys are all right. Justin makes too many jokes, and Zach's right eye twitches a lot, but they're worth talking to, unlike a lot of people at this school.

Sometimes I can't focus on what our professor suggests because in front of me is a bleach blond head of hair that's always engulfed by a giant pink bandanna. Magdalene's face and body are pretty nice to look at, but her hair pisses me off. It's huge and always in my way.

She turns to me. "Are you doing anything this weekend?"

I look at Natalie. She's talking to the teacher about our "assignment." She glances at me and her hands go to her hair. "Yeah. I have plans."

Magdalene huffs and turns back to the paper in front of her.

"Bro," Zach leans over and whispers while his eye twitches. "You should hit that!"

I shake my head. "I have higher goals than that, bro."

He looks over at Natalie.

I'm not that obvious am I?

--

Freshmen Function Fridays. The event board thinks they're clever. Lots of alliteration makes things catchy, right? More like annoying.

"Should we go? Dr. Garitie said we should. He said it could give us an opportunity to meet people with good ideas."

"What? Do we not have good ideas?"

She rolls her eyes. "Apparently not. We're still undeclared and have no direction in life."

I cross my arms over my chest. "Well, we're not alone anymore. Maybe we have the right idea."

She laughs. I love making her laugh. "Or maybe they're just as dopey as we are."

"I kind of like everyone in there."

"Really?"

"Don't get me wrong, it was badass with just the two of us, but since we're stuck with other people I don't mind it being them."

She looks to the side. "Yeah, Zach and Justin are pretty cool."

Does she want me to say something about Magdalene? Is she jealous of something? "Yeah."

"So should we go or what?" Her hands braid small sections her hair.

"I think I'm gonna go out with my roommate tonight."

--

I used to be a fun drunk. Now all I do is think of her. Johnnie wants to have fun. "Roomie, we need to not be so down right now."

Johnnie doesn't worry about other guys' girlfriends. If he wants her he takes her. I want her. But I can't just take her. She wouldn't have me if I do that.

"Come on, bro. We have some hotness to attain."

The frats are dirty. Full of ugly drunk chicks. Fully of horny guys. Full of booze on the floor, permeating the air.

"That girl keeps looking at you, bro."

I can't see this girl's face. Maybe I should have stopped a few drinks ago. I thought that if I drank enough I'd forget she wasn't mine. It hasn't worked yet.

"She wants you so bad, bro. Go over there." Johnnie pushes me towards someone. I bump into her boobs.

She giggles. "That wasn't very nice, David." No one calls me David. How does this blur

know my name?

I think I mumble something.

She giggles again. "Let's dance."

The room spins. The blur grinds up against me. Johnnie hands me another drink. I usually have fun doing this.

When I wake up and see who's next to me I feel sick. She's trying to cuddle. She's smiling in her sleep. How did I not know who this was last night? How did I get that incoherent?

I slip my arm away from her. Find my clothes on the floor, next to a pink bandana. Walk out as quietly as possible.

Never again.

--

She's been acting weird since my sister visited. I haven't done anything wrong. She says she needs to spend more time with Evan, but I feel like she just doesn't want to be around me.

Maybe it's because my sister.

"Oh, you're Natalie? I've heard so much about you! I'm Kaycee."

Am I not supposed to talk about my friends to my sister? She's my best friend away from school. I tell her everything. I mean, obviously I told her some things that Natalie doesn't technically know about, but my sister wasn't that obvious. At least I didn't think so.

"Hi, Kaycee. Nice to meet you." They shook hands and then Natalie's fingers grabbed at her hair.

"This is Everett." Everett nodded. He's a good guy. Good for my sister.

"So what are we going to do today?" Kaycee asked.

The four of us just hung out all day. Sat around. Went to the food courts to eat. Just the four of us. I couldn't help but wonder if we looked like a double date. Probably not. Natalie tried to stay as far away from me as possible.

When Kaycee was leaving she took me to the side. "She's a nice girl, you know. I didn't meet her boyfriend or anything, but you're probably better than him." She winked. God, I hoped Natalie didn't hear.

She and Everett left my room. It was just Natalie and me. Her hands were braiding her hair and she absently stared at the blank TV.

"We could watch something."

She looked up. "What? Oh, sure. I guess. I might have a thing later, though. Evan said he'd text me."

She had mentioned it about ten times earlier. She and Evan were supposed to go out. We settled in to watch a movie. Johnnie brought a love seat, so we were basically touching. Her phone never went off once.

--

I haven't seen Natalie outside of class in weeks. She's ignoring me. I told her about the mistakes I've been making. Now she won't talk to me. I told her not to judge. I reminded her she had no reason to be pissed. She asked the question, so I told her what happened after I got drunk. I didn't want to tell her. I knew what she'd think. I knew it would kill my chances. But I can't just lie to her. The look on her face when I told her, it made me want to die. Maybe I should have lied.

I guess we didn't hang out for a bit before that either. I bet Evan won't let her. He's such a bag of suck.

In class we hardly talk, but I feel eyes in the back of my head sometimes. She's the only one behind me.

"Hey, do you want to study together tomorrow?"

She's packing her bag. She pushes her bangs out of her face. She doesn't look up. "Sure."

--

She's absently braiding part of her hair while reading. Her phone vibrates and she ignores it. I'm supposed to be reading too, but her shirt is cut too low and too much of her skin is exposed.

"Where's Evan?" I didn't mean to ask it. But the last few days I haven't seen them together as much. Maybe that's why she finally said yes to hanging out.

"Um? Studying? He has a test or something tomorrow. He doesn't like when I read in the same room as him, says it's distracting."

I don't have a second thing to say.

Her foot taps the ground. "Where's Magdalene?"

I'm confused. "Huh? Why would I have any idea where that whore is?"

"You would know. But I thought you guys were hanging out more. That's what she's been telling everyone lately. Plus she's always all over you when the group hangs out. Always all, 'Oh Davie, you're so funny!'" she imitates Magdalene's high pitched, whiny voice.

"I would know? You should know I'm not doing that anymore." Since I told her about everything that's happened I've stopped. Maybe it was mostly one specific night, but every time I

consider getting drunk I think of that look she gave me. Johnnie thinks I'm getting boring.

"Yeah? Well good for you. Glad your terrible decision helped to make you change your life around. Glad I had nothing to do with it."

"You're mad that I didn't stop drinking for you? You told me you didn't care! Why would it matter to you why I quit!" Besides, it was for you. But I can't tell you that.

She shakes her head. "Never mind. I have some reading to get done so I'm gonna head back to my room. Have a nice night." She slams her book into her bag and rushes out of the lobby. I didn't want to piss her off. Didn't even want to talk about that. I wanted to talk about how I should be the one in her bed every night, not that prick Evan. But we argued before the conversation got close.

--

"He ditched me again. Can I come over?" She sounds like she just got done crying.

I look at Johnnie sleeping on his bed. He's been sleeping all day. "Yeah. Call when you're at the door."

"Actually, could we just stay on the phone? It's kinda creepy out tonight." She sounds like a frightened little kid.

Like there's some scary monster out there. "Of course."

All I hear is her breathing, some wind.

"Why didn't he show?"

They had a date planned. Their first real date in months. He was going to drive. She probably stood by his car for forty-five minutes before she knew for sure. She always waits.

"Probably a frat thing. He hasn't answered yet."

I want to go find him and hit him. He made her stand outside in the creepy cold while he hit on some drunk girl. "Are you going to talk to him about it?"

She sniffles. "I mean, yeah. But it's not that big a deal. He forgets stuff a lot."

But it is in no way okay. She knows that. He doesn't deserve her. I probably don't either, but I would never leave her out in the cold.

"Come get me."

When I open the hall door I see where her mascara smeared. Where she tried to wipe away all her makeup. Where her hair got messed up when she changed out of the skimpy dress she had on for their date. I wish I got to see that dress. I open my arms and she falls into them. I want to kiss the top of her head. "Wanna watch a movie?"

She squeaks a reply.

If I could kill Evan I think I would.

--

Study, study, study. That's all I've done for two weeks. I probably should've learned this stuff the first time around. Finals. Then it's Christmas break and I'm free of all educational obligations. Free of my tiny dorm room. Free of thinking about things I shouldn't think about.

Kaycee called yesterday. Said she's dating a new guy.

"What about Everett?" He was a decent guy. Good to my sister.

"Oh, well... he's just too nice. Deril is so... hot. Plus he has a great sense of humor and this awesome car." She rambled about him for half an hour.

"When did this happen?" Everett loved her. I could tell. I thought she loved him, too.

"A bit after I visited you I guess. But anyway-" I didn't want to listen anymore.

"Hey I have some more studying to do. Have a nice night. Stay happy."

She chuckled. "Of course I'm happy."

How could she be after ditching Everett so quickly?

I don't want to call her, but concentrating isn't working anymore. "Hey, just wondering if you wanted to come over and help me study. I think my brain is broken."

She laughs quietly. "Sure. But I have to help Evan with something first. It should be quick."

An hour later she's finally over. "Hey."

I don't want to seem pissed. I am though. I hate that she's with him when I want her to be with me. When she should be with me.

"Hey. Sorry that took longer than I thought."

I can only imagine what they were doing. It makes me sick.

We go over terms, dates, people's names. My brain retains nothing. She looks so good. Hair up, at the back of her head. Bangs brushed to the side. Flushed cheeks. V-neck shirt that's just low enough. Skinny jeans. She looks so good.

"Hello?"

I forgot to answer her question.

"I can't concentrate anymore. Break?"

She looks at her phone. "Okay." She looks back up. "So how was your day?"

I get us both water bottles from Johnnie's small fridge where he hides his booze. I hand her one. "Fine. My sister called."

She takes a drink. Redoes her hair. "Oh. How is she?"

She doesn't like to talk about my sister for some reason. "Supposedly good. She's dating some new guy. Says she's in love."

"What? A new guy? She was just here a few weeks ago! What about that Everett guy? He was nice."

"That's what I said. She said Everett was too nice."

She shakes her head. "Nice would be nice."

Evan isn't nice? "That's what I thought."

She's looking down. Playing with her hair. She doesn't say anything back.

--

"Are you going to that dance after break?" Her room is still like a sauna. Even in the middle of winter she wears those short shorts and tank tops in here. I can only imagine what it feels like on her bed.

"And who exactly would I go with? Not as if there's many girls pining over a date with me." I need to stop staring, but I can't help it as she leans over her suitcase and pulls something out of a drawer.

"Please, there are plenty of girls who would go with you. You could always ask Magdalene. She'd probably die of happiness."

Why did she bring her up again? "Yeah, well- not going to happen. She's not my type. Besides, I'm interested in someone else." I didn't need to give her a reason. Such a bad idea to bring it up. But I need to. I need to know what she thinks.

She looks over at me. "Oh really? Who is this new lucky girl? You gonna ask her?"

How to answer. "She's not new, first of all, and secondly, no. She... has reasons to be ignoring my advances."

"Not new? Ignoring your advances? You've liked this girl before?"

"More like... still, I suppose. Very low key of course. Like I said, she ignores my advances."

"Well, how do you know she's ignoring them? Maybe she doesn't know they're there."

"She knows." She definitely knows.

"How do you know?" She's no longer packing for winter break. Her long legs are sprawled on the floor and as she looks at me her hands move to her hair and start braiding.

"I can just tell."

"Well, why is she ignoring you then? Huh, Mr. Hotshot?" Twisting fingers, bouncing legs. She's uncomfortable. She knows.

“Simply put she already has a boyfriend. But I know something she refuses to admit.”

“And what’s that?” Her eyes dart to the floor if I look at her too long. I can’t help but stare.

“She wants to date me more than her boyfriend.”

She’s looking down again. “Did she tell you that?”

“No.”

She makes a face. “Then how would you know?”

“There are some things you can just tell.”

“How? You’re not in her head.”

Her hands are picking at the ends of her hair. I sit on the edge of her bed. He’s been in here before. They’ve been in here together. I could kill him.

“Some people aren’t very good at keeping things just in their heads.”

Her hands drop. “You think so?”

She knows.



The Violinist
Shayna Polomchak

A Hero for the Hero

Michael Sosnowski

Turning on his turn signal, Jonas slowly rounded the curve. The stoplight in his rear-view mirror glowed red like a pair of fiendish eyes in the dark night. Jonas thought to himself that this was just another part of driving he could do without. Jonas hated driving. It was a reminder of what he had lost. Back in the good old days he never had to drive, but at sixty-seven, the good old days were long over and would never come back.

The radio made driving even more unbearable than it should be. Unable to listen to news stories, Jonas constantly had to change the channel, and going without the radio was impossible because without it he grew tired. So in order to avoid the local news, Jonas had quickly changed the channel. An ad for some new fast food chain chimed out of the speakers followed by the channel's information. Then came the song: "Believe It Or Not" a song about the good old days from the good old days. As the chorus played, Jonas thought back to those good old days.

There he stood shaking hands with the mayor for a job well done. The crowd was cheering, the sun was shining, and Jonas was there in his powered costume. Known to the world at the time as The Spartan, Jonas was a hero of comic book proportions. In his costume, he could out run sound, toss buildings, and even soar like eagle. No man was equal... but several were his foils. One such foil decided that he would be a hero amongst villains and take out not only the mayor but also The Spartan.

As the flash on the local reporter's camera went off, there was a great crash and the sound of a woman screaming. The Minotaur had crashed the party and was looking to make party favors of the two men currently mid handshake. The Minotaur had earned his rep for having the build and brains of a man that was fathered by a bull. The genetic implants that gave him those viscous horns and more muscles than an entire football team combined helped to complete the image. Thinking quickly, Jonas was prepared to jump into action.

"SPARTAN I AM HERE FOR YOUR AND THE MAYOR'S HEADS!" shouted The Minotaur in a bestial roar.

"Excuse me, Mr. Mayor, but it seems that someone has taken a wrong turn on the way to the rodeo," retorted Jonas both reassuringly and jauntily.

Like a bolt of lightning Jonas shot into action, spear and shield in hand. These combined with his armor made him a proverbial tank, however. The Minotaur had been known to literally eat a tank

or two. This battle would take both smarts and wit.

"I'm gonna have to take you out to pasture again, Mini, if you aren't a good boy and return to your maze right this instance," taunted Jonas.

"YOU NOT FUNNY SPARTAN YOU JUST A DEAD MAN WALKIN'. I CRUSH YOU LIKE ROCK!" roared The Minotaur in rage.

"Oh, I see your grammar is improving there Mini, but I warned you. Now you'll have to go back to the state pen," replied Jonas as he struck The Minotaur with his spear.

WHACK! Then he hit The Minotaur with a nasty left hook, shield included. BAM! The Minotaur seemed dazed but only for a moment. After that, The Minotaur took to clobbering him. WHACK! BAM! POW! BOOM! Jonas was flung through a nearby brick wall. The impact left a ringing in his ears and stars floating before his eyes, however his uncanny wit had yet to abandon him.

"Jeez! Mini, you're like a bull in a china shop," quipped Jonas.

"YOUR JOKES OLD AND STUPID. YOU BE LUCKY THOUGH TO LIVE TO BE OLD AS THEM CUS I GONNA BREAK YOU!" grunted The Minotaur as he continued to pummel Jonas.

Alas, Jonas saw his opening as The Minotaur prepared to hit him for the thirty-somethingth time. Using all his might, Jonas plunged his spare into The Minotaur's side. The sonic resonator at the tip of the spear had the potential to topple foundations—it knocked The Minotaur a couple of feet back leaving him sprawled out on his back. Reacting with great haste, Jonas leapt atop the hulking figure and bound his arms to the ground using the reinforced megatonium bars that Jonas carried on his person for emergencies such as this.

After the adrenaline wore off, Jonas sent a call to SVDA (Super-Villain Detainment Agency) to properly take and lock up The Minotaur. Once they had arrived and carried the beast-man away Jonas posed for more photos and shook hands with the mayor all over again. It was just another day as a superhero.

The Minotaur had met his maker (Jonas shuttered thinking about what kind of being would make something like The Minotaur) some thirty years ago, something to do with physics catching up to him and his back breaking from the excursion of carrying all those muscles and doing all that senseless fighting.

Another set of red eyes appeared before Jonas, and he responded in time by gently applying the needed pressure to his breaks. The car in front of him then signaled that it was about to turn left at the intersection and Jonas' mood about driving flared up again. People who made left turns on this

road always caused delays and meant that he might be late to the party; he hated being late.

The party was in honor of his friend Bailey's sixtieth birthday. Bailey had been a good friend of Jonas's since the days of yore, and they occasionally fought side by side when the times called for it. Bailey however had to give up the gig even sooner than Jonas had had to. Bailey was just never the same after that incident with 0K (Zero-K).

It was a warm day in Urbanapolis, or at least a warm day considering 0K was causing trouble. 0K had been out freezing the citizens and buildings of the city again for God knows what reason. At first, it had just been a string of petty robberies but it was starting to get out of hand now that 0K had frozen the power station and left the city in the dark. Bailey, or Professor Dynamo as he was known then, stood at Jonas's side.

"What do you think his motives are?" questioned Bailey.

"Not sure. New ice age, respect, women, who knows." answered Jonas.

"Well it doesn't matter. We'll take that freak down a peg and send him back to prison where he belongs," replied Bailey.

"If we're to succeed we will have to get going soon," Jonas said.

"Then hop in. Thor can get us there faster than you can run. I know that sounds impossible, but with a little tweakin' from yours truly, he can outrace even Photon Man," boasted Bailey.

Even though Jonas didn't believe Bailey, he opened Thor's passenger side door and hopped in. Thor was a souped up '71 Thunderbird, equipped with everything Bailey required, including a power and performance booster taken straight from Bailey's powers. Bailey wasn't lying this time though. Thor really did move faster than Jonas ever could, maybe truly faster than Photon Man. At this speed, they found 0K rather easily.

He was at the local TV broadcasting station tampering with the new high tech satellite that had been installed just a month before he showed up. What he was planning to do with it since there was no power was a mystery to Jonas.

"Ahh, The Spartan and Professor Dynamo. Y'all are just in time to help me reach my goal." shrieked 0K in his frigid, dead voice.

"And what would that be, creating a lifetime supply of snow cones for yourself?" retorted Jonas.

"No, I'm far more ambitious than that today. Today I'm going to achieve WORLD DOMINATION!" exclaimed 0K

"We're not in the mood for your jokes Zero. You've broken the law and harmed innocent people," replied Bailey.

"Well, from what Mr. Spartan considers funny, I'll take that as a compliment," spat OK
 "You leave us no choice but to defeat you!" shouted Jonas.

In a blink of an eye, Jonas and Bailey were there exchanging blows with OK. BAM! POW! WHAM! The fight went on and on, until Bailey got fed up and decided to blast OK with a nice jolt. At the last second though OK grabbed Bailey's arms and redirected the bolt towards the now sinister looking satellite.

"HAHAHAHA! You fools! I knew the two of you would show up," exclaimed OK with glee. "I intentionally shut down the city's power so that you would be called Professor Dynamo. And now you are the energy source for my rise to power. This satellite is modified with my patented freeze ray technology and with the power you're so graciously providing; it will freeze the entire world, and only I will have the means to outlast it. Don't you see? I win because of you Professor Dynamo!"

"NOOOO!" shouted Bailey in horrified shock.

Just when it all seemed lost, Jonas sprang forward and stabbed the dish with his spear turning it into the equivalent of crumpled balled of tin foil, and destroying his spear in the process.

"You'll pay for that!" OK hissed as he raised his freeze ray directly at Bailey and fired.

Jonas couldn't prevent the damage caused by the ray but he was able to hurl his shield at OK's head, knocking him unconscious. Jonas made haste and quickly restrained the limp OK, and then rushed to his friend's side. Jonas could see that Bailey would survive this ordeal, really only needing a blanket to keep him warm; after all he was Professor Dynamo.

That encounter may not have cost Bailey his life but it cost him his passion to fight for justice. That day also started Jonas on his own path to retirement.

The radio buzzed with static and Jonas flipped the station to something with a little better quality. Another problem with driving; even if he could enjoy the radio the destination always moved him out of the stations' range. This time the red eyes were to his side as he passed someone attempting to back out of their driveway. He passed them at a half speed and kept going; the party was in fifteen minutes and he still had over twenty miles to go. He hated being late, he hated having to drive, he hated everything. He used to be happy but his final run in with The Creeper drained him of what little happiness was left after Bailey's mishap.

"What happened to you? You used to be so happy, so passionate, so two dimensional, so idealistic. Now you're just another hero with issues, and quite frankly I'm sick of you whiners," quipped The Creeper.

"Shut up! You've killed eight people now and I'm here to stop you. I don't have time for this incessant rant," barked Jonas

“Oh what? No puns? Did that run in with OK leave you with the chills? Life give you the cold shoulder after that? HAHA!” jested The Creeper.

Jonas never liked The Creeper. They were archenemies, Jonas fighting to save what is right and The Creeper heralding everything that was wrong. The Creeper looked (for lack of a better word) creepy, an exact match to the guy on neighborhood watch signs, unless you removed his hat, then he looked like Nosferatu. The Creeper sounded creepy, like whispers in the dark. The Creeper acted creepy, popping out of the shadows to stalk his victims or enemies ruthlessly. The Creeper was creepy, and he was evil.

Recently The Creeper had been responsible for a rash of murders and robberies. Seemingly benign crimes for a criminal of The Creeper’s caliber, so there had to be something more sinister under the surface. Yet, the victims themselves were odd: not odd like an uncanny connection between them or sufferers of social leprosy, no, they were just ordinary, everyday, nothing-to-see-here, average citizens. And the places he looted were just run-of-the-mill places that normally only low life goons hit: jewelry stores, banks, convenience stores, etc. The Creeper had been making himself busy with a lot of small crime, and Jonas was at a loss as to what The Creeper had going on in his twisted mind.

However, Jonas would rather cut off his own right arm than let The Creeper go on killing innocent civilians and stealing from hardworking, taxpaying citizens. Thus with his usual zeal, Jonas had been tracking The Creeper tirelessly since the moment he wound up in town. His efforts had paid off though, that night he had managed to chase The Creeper across half a city block’s worth of rooftops, where, as per usual, The Creeper decided to exchange blows.

WHAP! BAM! KAPOW! Jonas threw everything he had at The Creeper, yet he just couldn’t hit him. The Creeper always seemed three steps ahead of him. Jonas’s wits were no match for The Creeper’s and had to rely on brute force to stop the fiend; yet brute force seemed to have abandoned him.

“What’samatter? Too many tears in your eyes to hit me?” cackled The Creeper.

“AHHHH!” was the only response Jonas could muster as he jabbed ferociously at The Creeper.

“HAHAHAHA! Look at you. You’re pathetic. You’re washed-up. A loser. You’re not superhuman, you’re barely even a man.” barbed The Creeper. “Don’t you see? Without your superhero mindset, you’re just some freak in a silly costume. Do yourself a favor and hire a shrink.”

Just as Jonas was about to swing at The Creeper for the umpteenth time, The Creeper did something surprising—he pulled out a watch. A look of surprise caught on Jonas’s face just long

enough for The Creeper to interpret it.

“Oh ho! What was that? Shock? Come on we’ve been at this game of cat and mouse for years. You should know full well a bomb timer when you see one.” explained The Creeper. “But the only problem is that you’ll never be able to stop the explosion in your has-been state. A shame too, since the bombs are planted in Urbanapolis Stadium. I guess 50,000 football fans will just have to perish tonight. HAHAAAAHA! Eh, humanity should consider it a favor. Just helping speed up evolution. You know what though I’ll keep being generous and close my eyes for a few seconds and let you try and get it. ONE. TWO. THREE... ”

“You disgust me! But, if I should know that that’s a bomb timer then you should know that I’ll stop it before it hits zero.” replied Jonas before launching himself at the watch.

“FOUR. FIVE. Oh too slow!” chimed The Creeper as he pulled the watch away from Jonas.

But Jonas would not give up that easily. He rushed at the creeper. Left, right, down, left. But it was all to no avail. Jonas gave one final attempt, he feigned left, then lunged right, and grabbed the timer right out of The Creeper’s hand. Looking down he saw that there was only a few seconds left, he popped open the back of the timer and removed the red wire—it was always the red wire. The time stopped and Jonas let out a sigh of relief. But before he could get too comfortable, Jonas heard a series of small clicks, and then the insane laughter of The Creeper.

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! Oh how the mighty have fallen!” chimed The Creeper with maddeningly glee. “Two years ago you would have just succeeded. But alas, do you hear those clicks? Those are the bombs activating as we speak! You see this time I didn’t make the timer the detonator, just simply a timer until the bombs go off. You see I activated their countdown twenty minutes ago from a remote destination. There was no way a wash-up like you could actually stop me. HAHAAAAHA!”

Just then, there was a flash of light and a loud roar from where the Stadium had stood only a second before. A fireball leapt into the air and a look of absolute terror spread across Jonas’s face.

“That’s right. That was all you and your inadequacies my good friend. I’d love to stay and congratulate you on a job well done but I must be off. Tata.” said The Creeper as he vanished in a cloud of smoke leaving Jonas to stare blankly in terror.

That night when Jonas got home, he did what he had to do and burned his uniform. He vowed from that day forth never to be The Spartan again. However, since that day, his life had been miserable and he was stuck having to be normal, which meant driving around.

Jonas was so lost in memories that he almost forgot about the task at hand. Before him was another pair of red eyes, but he managed to stop in time. As he was starting to accelerate it began to rain. "Great!" thought Jonas as he turned on the windshield wipers, just another fifteen miles to go.

Abortion: A Circle of Hell

Zach Conrad

O, the screaming I now hear!
How the sound of it makes me cringe.
What is this noise that now turns the skies deep red?

After visiting the blazing fire of their heretics' tombs,
what an even more terrifying place to behold
the blood red moon now shines our way.

Virgil led me to the next circle of Hell,
a circle where numbers had increasingly grown over the past century;
this circle, as he told me, punishes the sins of Abortion and its contributors.

Before me stood three enormous mounds, each one taller than the next;
the place was filled with the screams of many
as if the air itself protested existence.

Virgil pointed to the entrance of this circle.
The gate was a meshing of sharp barbs, which were dripping with deep, red blood;
the blood of whom I was not sure, nor was Virgil, but I had a group in mind.

Upon approaching the gate, we see both doors have been opened;
a door which Jesus Christ, during His descent in Hell, opened to receive His little ones;
to take with Him who had no chance at earthly life.

I asked what to expect in this hellish realm.
Virgil replied, "What you hear is not near as terrible as what you will see,"
at this, we entered the gate, unscathed by the rigid barbs.

As soon as we entered, we noticed someone up ahead.
Kneeling towards the first mound was a man covered in a fine blue cloth;
his eyes were focused up to Heaven, with an air of incredible solemnity.

Walking up to this individual, I noticed something brilliant in his hand.
It was a rosary, which sparkled deep blue amongst the reddish surroundings;
he slowly turned his gaze towards Virgil and me.

“What you will see here is what I fought against all my life,” he said slowly,
“The souls which reside here have taken life shortly and played God with contempt,”
he began to cry, grasping tightly to the gleaming rosary in his hand.

“Who are you?” I asked as he resumed his prayers silently.
He again turned to Virgil and I and replied, “I, like you, am here as ordained by Heaven.”
Turning to Virgil in surprise, I say “Is this truly a man from God?” Virgil nodded.

I began to ask this pious man why he was sent;
he told me of his own personal desire to pray for an end to Abortion.
At this, he turned back his gaze to Heaven and would talk no more.

I inquired more from Virgil as to whom this was.
Virgil told me that he was a man belonging to Heaven;
he had fought against abortion in life, and continues in death, until Christ comes again.

Truly humbled by this, Virgil and I continued up the first mound, screaming ever before us.
Upon reaching the flat top of the mound, I was in such disgust at the sight;
what I saw here turned my insides violently.

The wretched souls were grossly mutilating themselves.
The blood-curdling screams echoed from their depths;
they cut slowly and deeply with the razors littered across the ground.

This was only the first part of this circle, as Virgil explained.
 The souls here had supported and funded abortions;
 never a party to them, but always behind the scenes.

Virgil, even though he had been here before, was very tense,
 and the sight of these mutilated souls gave great distress to me;
 the razors that crunched below my feet never broke the screaming I was hearing.

We then came upon a group of mutilated souls whose marring was much worse;
 they were forcing razor sharp stakes into their hands and feet,
 I even noticed a gash in their sides, from which black fluid flowed.

I noticed one looking at me, and I approached her to speak,
 I asked, "Who are you to force the wounds of our Lord into your mutilated flesh?"
 And she to me, "I know not your Lord, I know but myself"

Perplexed by this, I inquired further to understand.
 "Who are you? For what reason are you here?"
 And she to me, "I am Sebelius, I played a game with your Mass, and I made the rules."

This woman, as I recalled her recent death, professed herself a Catholic in life;
 the Faith she confessed was altered and not that of Mother Church,
 as she received the Most Holy Host, she consumed the bread of death.

Knowing she was professing herself as a heretic, I turned to Virgil,
 "Why was this woman thrown in the fiery graves?"
 And he to me, "She took one further step, she endorsed and supported the law of this sin."

Gazing back on her horrible figure, I saw no remorse;
 her gaze was intent on her task, piercing her own right hand,
 and I, fearful of what I had seen, prayed for the intercession of St. Francis and moved on.

We then went down the other side of the mount into a valley.
It was quiet, dimly lit by the blood moon, lush grasses everywhere, cool water flowed freely;
this, Virgil explained, was the home of the unborn, whom Christ came for.

Rising before them was the second mound to climb.
As I ascended, I noticed no screaming, only silence;
what awaited me on the summit was ominous and I approached cautiously.

At the summit of the mound, many thousands of souls lay flat, a soft rain falling;
there was no screaming, and each soul was quiet as if asleep;
demons were standing over them, cutting them up with sharp knives.

The demons paid no attention to us as we passed, intent on their deed;
I asked Virgil, "Are these souls dead?"
He to me, "No, they are immobile, and very much awake, unable to cry out."

I then asked Virgil who these sinners were,
and he to me, "These are the souls of those who have advised or forced abortions on others."
O, the agony they must be feeling! Deep pain for their unfeeling souls in life, well deserved.

The rain continued to fall as we journeyed through the summit;
the rain, Virgil told me, was the tears of mothers of forced abortion.
The rain was a constant reminder to these souls of their sin, who could only cry themselves.

Virgil and I descended down the other side of the mound.
I noticed that this valley was much deeper than the last;
the screaming returned, louder than ever.

Before entering the blackness of the valley, two signs stood suspended before us;
the first read, The Hippocratic Oath, which was torn in two pieces,
the second read, Roe v. Wade and it was on fire, as if the Law itself needed purged.

Virgil advised me to stay close and to not leave his side.
He created a make-shift torch from a fallen branch and a scrap of cloth;
we then descended into darkness, me unknowing of the blackness ahead.

The screaming increasingly grew,
the darkness was as black as a mother's womb,
blackened further by the by the swift taking of life within its walls.

I never let go of Virgil, but became increasingly aware of others close by.
As we walked across the valley, souls were rushing past us;
the fear I saw in their faces was terrifying, and I began to fear myself.

Virgil explained that the souls were those of doctors who carried out abortions;
they were running from the spears of demons, who could see them in the dark.
We had to make sure not to confront any of the demons here.

Suddenly, a soul grabbed me and pleaded to be taken away;
I told him to follow me and to talk of his life to escape the spears temporarily,
and he agreed and Virgil led us to the ascent of the third mound, where we paused to talk.

The soul could not ascend the mount, and could speak only for a moment;
his name was Tiller and he performed abortions regularly in his earthly life,
"I have taken over 60,000 lives, and for that I am speared through in the dark, as I did in life."

I asked him, "Why did you do this?"
And he to me, "It was legal of the law, which stands above morality."
Just then, a demon pierced him through and pulled him back into the darkness.

Stunned at this, Virgil and I quickly ascended the next mount;
the screams heard as we climbed were clearly feminine in tone.
I prepared myself in my heart for this final and highest mount.

Reaching the summit of this mount presented many thousands of women;
they were all crouched down or sitting up on the floor,
and they were in obvious pain and stress, and at first I didn't know for what reason.

Approaching them, I noticed their bellies to be quite swollen;
I quickly realized they were in labor, and were focused keenly on their fierce pain.
The only offspring brought forth from them was their own dead, deep red blood.

Virgil, looking all around, said to me, "These are the mothers who terminated their own flesh."
The ground was bloody with this deathly birth scene;
after being ignored many times by the wretched souls, it was time to move on.

We came upon a fountain at the middle of the summit.
Virgil and I sat at the foot of the fountain to rest,
the statue of Tiyanak looking down upon us.

"Meditate purposefully on what you have seen here," Virgil says.
As I sit, with screaming all around me, I see only blood;
the fountain itself brings forth a gushing of deep red, decayed blood.

"The law," I say, "has made men slaves to an unnatural order."
And he to me, "these souls have become complacent to murder.
The secular law and their own misguided minds are their only foundations."

With this, Virgil and I stood and headed down the other side of the mount;
the screaming of the women becoming fainter and fainter behind us,
the sky stayed deep red. I prayed quietly for stars.

Martian Field Notes

Dr. Mark Seely

It's two o'clock on a warm Saturday in early June. One of the residents of the large yellow house kitty-corner from mine emerges from her garage with her lawnmower in tow. It's an oversized self-propelled job with an engine that sounds like a small Harley Davidson. She mows first in a horizontal pattern across the front of the house, and then goes over the entire front lawn again on a diagonal to give the yard the look of a major league outfield. She stops every few passes to empty the grass catcher into a pile in the street. Although the yard is small and almost treeless, it nonetheless takes almost an hour for this first step to be completed. The mower is silent for a few moments before the next phase begins, with the high-pitched nerve-grating drone of a gas-powered weed-whacker. She runs it along the foundation of the house, around and around the small ornamental tree recently installed in the center of the yard, then along the sidewalk and curb like an edger—and even along the gutter in the street, slapping away any stray weeds that might have sprouted in the moist crack between the asphalt and the curb. The final step involves a leaf blower, belching blue smoke and sounding like the death howl of a thousand wolves. She works grass clippings off the sidewalk and into the street, herds rolling green piles toward the main pile of mower-dumpings, and then spends considerable time blowing the main pile around until it forms an aesthetically appealing mound along the curb. This weekly ritual will be repeated again and again until late fall. Every couple of weeks, starting in early spring, a small van emblazoned with the logo of a professional lawn care service pulls up and a man wearing knee-high rubber boots reels a hose spewing chemical fertilizer and pesticide (a potent weed-killer in this case) around the yard, ensuring a bountiful green weekend harvest throughout the summer.

An alien from another planet on an anthropological mission to Earth would be hard-pressed to explain this behavior. First, it appears to be a lot of effort directed toward something that has no real utility value. Second, it is enormously wasteful in terms of nonrenewable fossil resources: oil not only powers the lawn tools, the lawn service van, and the street waste collection truck, oil derivatives are also the primary ingredients in the chemical fertilizer and pesticide. Then there is the direct environmental impact. Lawns use more fuel and chemicals and produce more industrial toxins per acre than industrial agriculture—on the order of ten times more. Much of that chemical fertilizer and pesticide washes into the street where runoff drains send it into local rivers and streams. Some inevitably finds its way into local ground water where it can seep into municipal wells and into the sensitive developing bodies of children. Also, it has been estimated that weekly use of a gas

powered mower generates up to forty-three times as much air pollution as that generated by a typical car driven 12,000 miles. In addition, researchers have found that many gas powered lawn tools exceed environmental air quality standards with respect to several toxic byproducts, and may pose a serious health risk for the people who operate them. And as if that weren't enough, typical lawn mowing practices also threaten at least one endangered species of butterfly. Given all of this, my neighbor's devotion to her manicured patch of green suburban monoculture might be interpreted by an objective observer, our Martian ethnographer, as clear evidence of insanity.

The suburban American lawn makes an informative case study for highlighting our estrangement from the natural world, a kind of dualistic separation from nature that psychologist W. W. Adams calls a "fundamental delusion of humankind." When a colony of lowly termites builds an elaborately wrought mound, the result is considered part of the natural world. But when a colony of humans builds a skyscraper, it is evidence of human uniqueness and superiority. That we ourselves are a part of nature only applies to our physiology. The human mind is not natural, beyond natural, even divine. And further, because of our superior intelligence, we have the right to use the natural world in whatever ways we see fit. Who, after all, is in a better position to judge how the natural world is to be used? Nature is viewed as inert material "stuff," and when anthropomorphized, becomes a foreign antagonist, dumb and potentially hostile, but usually benign: something to be overcome and subdued. It is our manifest destiny as a species to conquer and ultimately control the natural world. This can be seen not just in our idiotic lawn practices, but in our mass-production approach to agriculture and in the ways that we "manage" our remaining wilderness areas as well. Even the popular notion of sustainability, the idea that we can somehow structure our posture toward the natural world in ways that prolong our ability to exploit it, say, through the development of so-called green technology, only perpetuates the fundamental delusion of separation.

Some have linked this delusion of separation to Judeo-Christian notions about humankind's role in a divine order, an order that includes a hierarchical distinction between humans and the rest of the natural world; but it clearly predates Judaism. Philosopher Mark Rowlands traces our desire to manipulate and control the natural world to our primate nature, specifically to the possession of opposable thumbs: with opposable thumbs the world and all its objects become potentially graspable. Not all groups of humans, however, view the natural world this way. Ethnographic studies of hunter-gatherers suggest that, for some, the idea of nature as a distinct conceptual category borders on incoherent. It doesn't make sense to speak of "everything" as if totality itself was a kind of object. The conceptual separation of humans from the rest of nature appears to be a view unique to agriculturalists. And the historical emergence of the idea of nature as a separate domain of

substance malleable to human purposes and subservient to human goals is tied to the emergence of domestication.

The change in the perceived relationship between humans and other animals that accompanies animal husbandry is informative in this regard. Hunting and gathering frequently coexists with what has been referred to as totemic culture. In totemic cultures, humans and other animals each belong to their own unique communities. There is the wolf community and the deer community, just as there are specific human communities. These communities equally participate in the world, although each may serve a different function with respect to the others. Humans in totemic culture occupy a special place in the world, but no more special than that occupied by the hawk or the opossum or the snake. Animal domestication changes this relationship among equals in the animal world and introduces hierarchies based on human purposes. This leads to an immediate distinction between those animals that are under human domestic control and those that are “wild” and uncontrolled. An artificial hierarchy emerges within the animal kingdom as domestic animals become dumb, subservient creatures, both in human thought and, through the accumulative deformation of artificial selection, in actual fact.

The world-views of present-day hunter-gatherers suggest that the antagonism toward nature and the natural environment displayed by my neighbor’s insane lawn-care activities is not itself part of our innate human nature. It is a historical artifact linked to the adoption of agriculture-based life-ways. Daniel Quinn, in his engaging and unique novel, *Ishmael*, makes a distinction between two general ways of being in the world, represented by two groups that he calls the leavers and the takers. The leavers are those people (and the rest of the natural world) who live according to the fundamental laws of nature, including the law that you kill only what you need to survive and the law that you don’t actively prevent others from taking what they need. The leavers respect the diversity of the natural world and recognize their place as part of that diversity. The takers, as the name suggests, live by a different code entirely. They see the diversity of the natural world as a threat. They not only take more than they need, but they actively seek out and destroy their competition. Quinn links the historical emergence of agriculture with the rise of the taker approach and the beginning of widespread displacement of leavers by takers. By its nature, an agricultural lifestyle leads to an increase in population. Additional land is necessary to feed the increasing number of mouths, which leads to an even further increase in population necessitating even more land. Eventually, the agriculturalists’ need for land puts them in competition with those following a subsistence lifestyle (the leavers). When this happens, the leavers are either assimilated or destroyed. Modern civilization has globalized this process. And as a society of modern-day takers,

we have the full power of the industrial revolution behind us, which has greatly enhanced the speed and efficiency with which we are able to eliminate the competition. One need only look at the accelerating rate of species extinction, and at what is happening to the last remaining leavers, the isolated indigenous in Africa, South America, and the arctic regions, who are being given the Hobson's choice: either assimilate or disappear.

Delusions are demonstrably false beliefs. But they often serve to rationalize behavior that would otherwise be unacceptable. The delusion of separation from nature is both a cause and an effect of the takers' belief that the natural world is potential competition and must be either subdued or destroyed. This delusion helps to explain the strange paradox that we engage in such profoundly corrosive behavior with respect to the natural world despite the fact that we are wholly dependent on its continued health and integrity. Once you allow for the fundamental delusion of separation, the paradox disappears. Further, by first objectifying nature the stage is set for justifying any environmentally destructive act whatsoever as long as it serves to someone's (temporary) advantage, in much the same way that demonizing an enemy is one of the first steps nations take as they prepare to go to war. Eradicating an Appalachian ecosystem with a mountaintop strip mine and vaporizing an Afghani village with a cluster bomb both require that a considerable amount of psychological distance be placed between the aggressor and the target of the aggression.

The suburban American lawn, along with suburban America itself, perhaps, is destined for extinction. The biosphere will not long support the continuation of such perverse and misplaced vanity. All delusions eventually butt up against reality. And, just the other day I discovered a dandelion that had somehow managed to push itself through a small jagged crack in the sidewalk in front of the yellow house; it had somehow ducked the weed-whacker, somehow resisted the bi-weekly rain of herbicide, its fluffy gray head packed and ripe and bobbing with the warm evening breeze. It took only a casual nudge from my shoe to send hundreds of seed parachutes air-born, spreading themselves gently across a pristine sea of green.

Meanwhile, somewhere nearby, a Martian anthropologist scribbled feverishly in his notebook.

Prayer

Dr. Rochelle Robertson

One triangular manger,
is a tree of Jesse's spirit,
a family's heritage;
and Christian lineage.
One hierarchal manger,
green leaves woven on wire,
magnetic figures stuck to stations
commemorates in
and out of season.

Joyful angel
on highest bough
observes Christ child
sticking to rectangle of hay.
Mary and Joseph
joyfully juxtapose right hand
and left,
while Wise men
tethered by ionic attraction,
hold lower places
with frozen gifts
in outstretched arms.

Two of these
are surely wise;
bear offerings recognizable,
stand square,
gaze humbly.
A third
is missing

his head.

Is he the paradox of faith?

How can he judge wisely

when to give,

how to receive,

or in dying

how we might live?

Might he symbolize

the real

which tempers a Normal Rockwell fantasy?

On the musty television,

decorating with damaged goods

reads poor-ly...

like child

without a home

or bed,

in the cold

from birth.

Thou, I, or

we?

For we rarely know

what we're offering.

We lose our minds

chasing perfection.

We are never complete

before Christ.

Still the child,

arms outstretched,

smiles.

Same spirit.

Uncommon gift.

Wisdom of mis-happenstance:
God's surprise
designed for
made-up minds
to re-consider.

Offering from afar,
this piece...
Once a small flea market price,
thought counting,
like pennies earned, spent and given.
This crèche,
a poem
reaching toward heaven
in meager abode.

On This Harvest Moon

Dr. Charles Kerlin

On the first day of winter, I watched the Anne Hathaway movie *One Day* with our kids. It's about Emma and Dexter, who meet up the night they graduate from college. They go to her room, try to make love, but he is drunk. Emma, though fascinated by him, agrees that it is best for them to just be friends. The rest of the movie is about their meeting for twenty years on July 15th, the same day they met. Though clearly in love, they are often angry with each other because they live such different lives. Emma, a teacher, has an alcoholic boyfriend she doesn't love; Dexter becomes an annoying TV personality and marries a woman who cheats on him. After his divorce, they finally admit that they are in love and they marry. A year later, Emma, riding home one evening on her bicycle, is hit and killed by a garbage truck.

She is shown dying in the street, and then there's a flashback to the morning after they first met, when they were unable to make love. They take a walk on a mountain overlooking Edinburgh and realize that they want each other. They race down a hillside covered in wildflowers to his hotel, but find his parents waiting for him there. Embarrassed, they say goodbye, then more goodbyes, then, "I'll be seeing you."

I remembered your favorite song, Neil Young's "Harvest Moon" and the line, "I want to see you dance again," and I started to cry for you and for me and for Scott and for Haley and I hid my tears from them. It was 4:00 o'clock and already dark. Outside a cold winter moon was just rising above our deck which was bare, with all the summer furniture taken inside. I put on the Bears vs. Miami game, gathered up the chips and the salsa I had made with the small remaining tomatoes from our garden, and took everything I was able to carry into the kitchen, where we made the lasagna you had taught us all to make.

Violet & Edward

Dr. Maia Hawthorne

Violet

She grew accustomed to being awakened in the nighttide.
 Disease always tightens its grip once the sun is gone.
 “Viola,” her father would whisper, calling her by the latin name.
 She would wrap a cloak over her shift, grab her kit, be hoisted up
 to sit in front of him on the saddle as they flew over country roads.

There had been much disease that summer:
 the effluvium that passed through the body, wasting it away,
 the throat accretion that left children fighting for air,
 the dream that delivered paralysis in the morning,
 the plague that shrunk the skin and painted it blue.

Her father ministered the afflicted.
 He spent his days making
 effusions, tinctures, balms, distillates.
 He spent his nights battling demons.
 He said, “The mind can only be clear, Violet,
 when the body is in good health. We are members of the order
 of harmony, of peace.”

He named her for the plant that restores health after long illness,
 the aid in respiration, the alleviator of pain, the sleep-inducer,
 the tender blossom worn to ward off deception.

But in the end,
 her name did not protect her from the affliction that descended like a lie
 when she hunted the night-blooming moon lily at her father’s request.
 The monster in the dark left her
 empty yet ambulant,

undead,
wondering what God had in store for her now,
what ministrations she could deliver
exhaling the miasma of the night

Edward

He saw it as his duty,
standing watch over his brother every night.
His parents had told him: his name meant “guard.”
He couldn’t imagine his name had been a mistake.
There was something here, something he was meant to watch for,
something for which he must be vigilant in the night.

It was when the fits descended upon Timothy
—the fever, the chills, the night terrors—
it was when those fits possessed his brother that Edward knew it,
came to understand that there was something lurking in the dark,
some mindless terror that was plodding its way toward them,
every night, ever nearer.

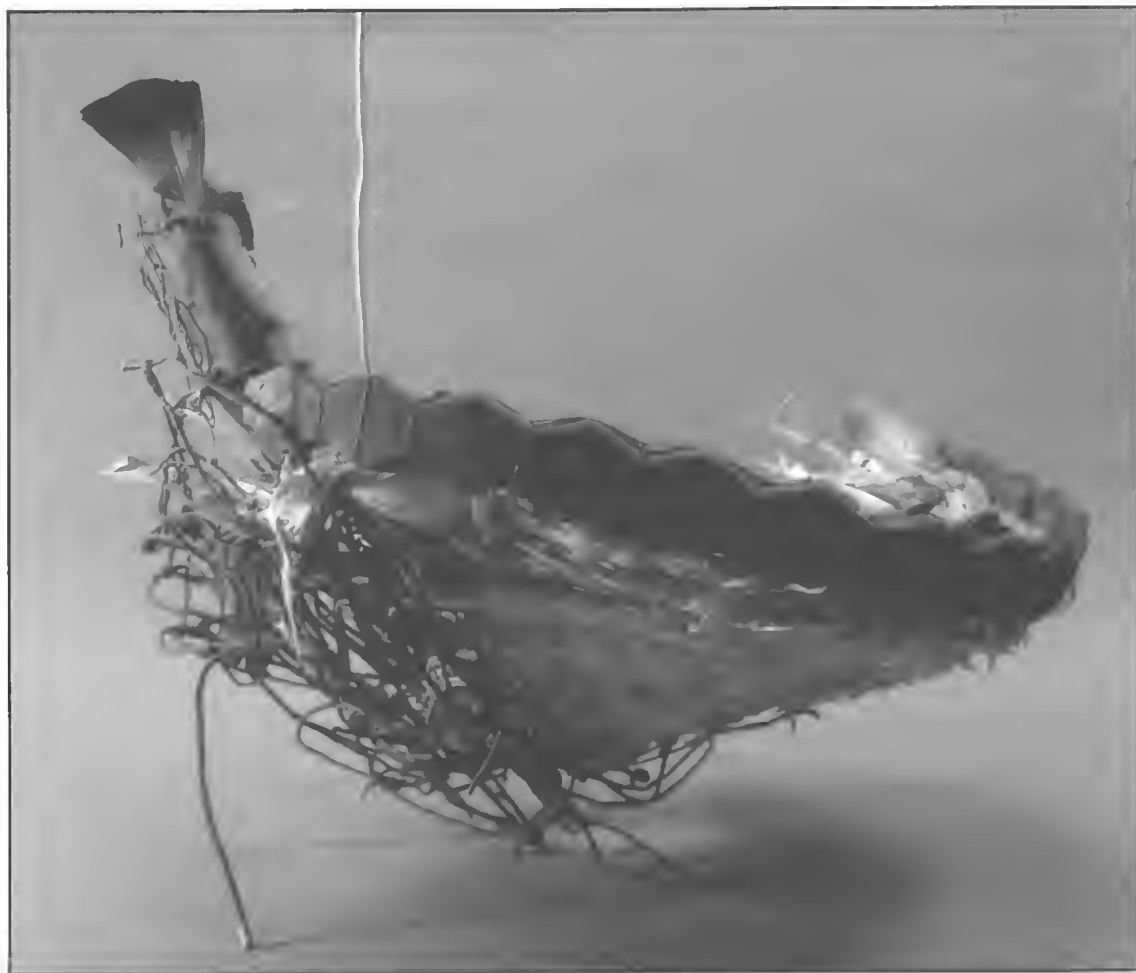
And tonight the doctor arrived,
the doctor whose daughter had been said to have
the gift of healing,
the gift that could but raise the dead.
During his vigils Edward had imagined her,
imagined her placing her hand on Timothy’s cheek,
then turning, slowly, to face him,
her eyes revealing some mystery of his name.

But the doctor who arrived muttered that his daughter had been taken.
He was a pantomime of suffering,
nervous hands waving away the questions,
asking only to be taken to the sick boy.

When the bedroom door closed,
Edward walked out into the night to wonder:

he wondered at the doctor's eyes,
he wondered at the daughter's fate,

and when the monster took him, he wondered
what he would guard now,
now that he was the terror in the night.



The Dance
Professor Bonnie Zimmer

Cover Photo: Pandera by Juan Carlos Rodriguez

